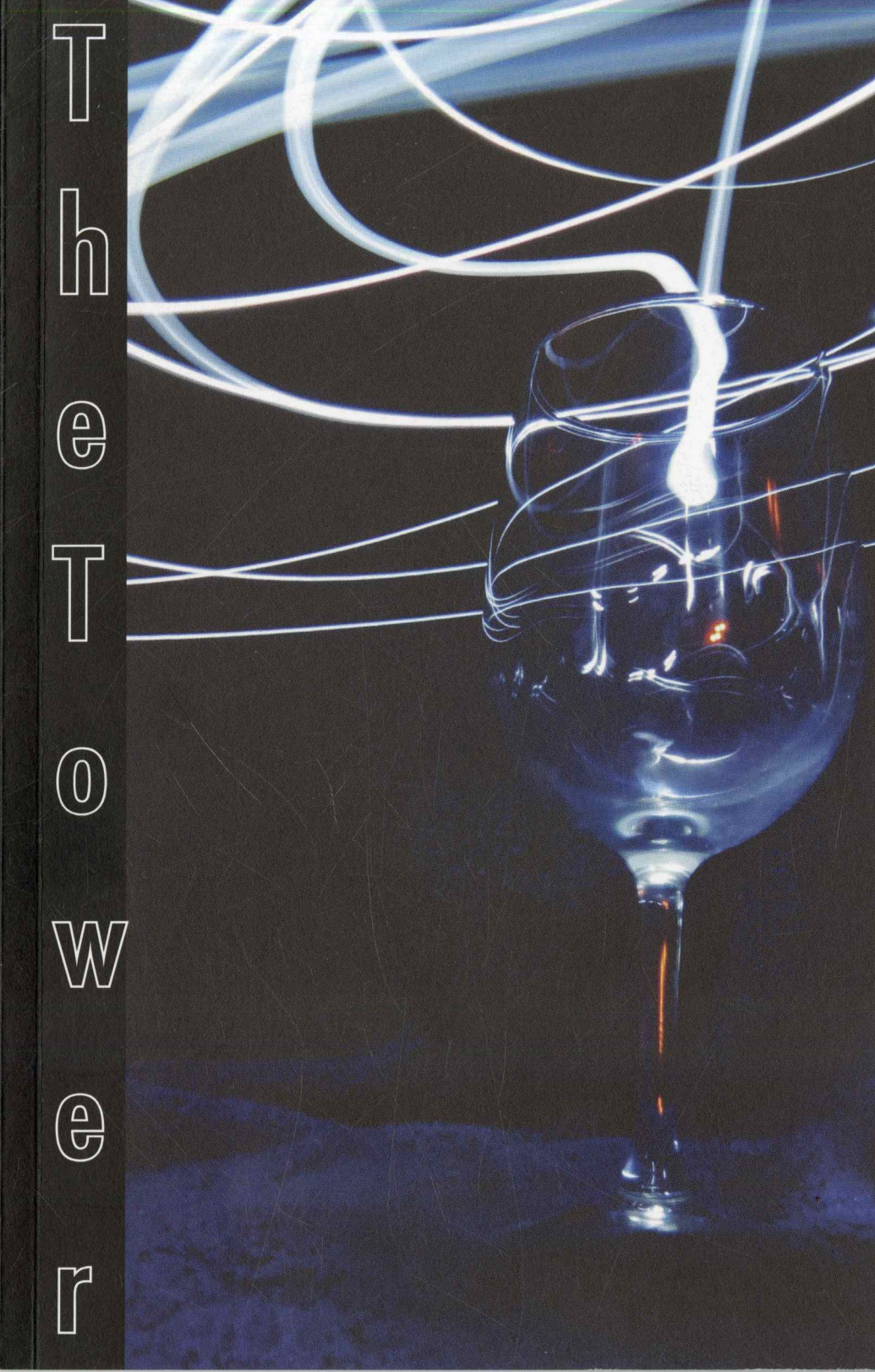

The Tower

Letter from the editor

Reader,

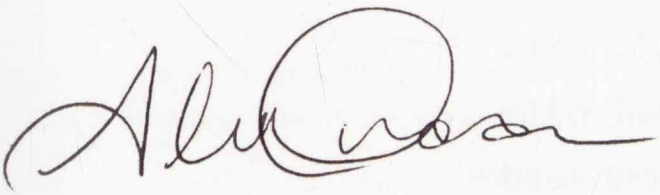
I am so happy to offer you this issue of *The Tower.* There were many amazing submissions for this publication, and I think you will find that fact reflected in the quality of the work printed here.

This magazine would not have been possible without my wonderful faculty advisor, Bryn Chancellor, the amazing Tiffany Bunt, and the talented Clarke Stackhouse.

I want to thank all of the people that submitted. *The Tower* can only be as good as the submissions, and I believe this issue is amazing! I also want to thank the staff that worked so hard to choose the selections for this issue.

Finally, I want to thank you, the reader. You are the reason *The Tower* is produced each year. Thank you for taking the time to pick up and view the incredible works submitted from the talented students on this campus!

So Thank You! And I hope you enjoy!



Alexis Duncan

Tower

Editor-in-Chief

The Tower

University of Montevallo
2015

Alexis Duncan, editor-in-Chief

Bryn Chancellor, advisor

Poetry

Candice Crutchfield, editor

Prose

Briana McDade, editor

Heather Sprowl, editor

Sarah Sizemore, reader

Sylvan Baker, reader

Artwork

Sara Perry, editor

Cover Photo by: Chantel Clubb
Layout Design by: Clarke Stackhouse

The Tower is a publication solely of, by, and for the students at the University of Montevallo. Its content reflects the interests of UM students and the magazine's student editors and do not necessarily represent the views of UM staff, faculty, or administration.

This publication may contain language or imagery inappropriate for children, and may be offensive to some readers.

tower@montevallo.edu

Table of contents

On as yet unmade decisions by Lily Elmore 8
Morning reflection by Kimberly McWhorter 8
Confetti by Issac Nunn 9
Normal girls poop by AKL Waites 10-12
In lieu of leaving by Wanda Wesolowski 12
Composition 1: in memory of John Cage by Joel Nelson 12
Free at last by Robby Wise 13
Realism by Rebekah Koen. 13
Kalopsia by Jessie Russell 14
I will not stay by AnnaLeah Comer 14
What happens while you stare by Susannah Ritchey 15
Open by Abigail Betts 16
Glitter and death by Hannah Martin 16
Thoreau by Abigail Betts 16
Parfait by Victoria Prosser 16
A short reminiscence of my life by J. Russell 17
Father time by Carla Smith 17
Hung by nails by Keshia McClantoc 18-19
Sound of solitude by Mary Catherine Fehr 19
Quiet by Giselle Casadaban 20-21
A response to a dream deferred by Milissa Richardon 21
The asteroid's impact by Taylor Dellinger 22-28
Innocent beauty by Jeremy Black 28
She and I by J. Russell 29
Night by J. Russell 29
Burn by Heather Wade 30-32
Encountering a pegasus by Marissa Tom 32
Catharsis by Rebekah Koen 33
Fragmented by Sabrina Abrego 33
Who we used to be by Audrey Bearss 34-37
Somerville by Asha Butler 37
Sugar by Amy George 38
A broken crown by Samuel Hollingsworth 38
Forest fire by Abigail Betts 39-40
Colors of fall by Shannon Turek 40
The unholy communion by Arcadia Armalli 41-47
Cherish by Mary Catherine Fehr 47
Our place by J. Russell 48-53
A rose in bloom by Shannon Turek 53
The me-loaf exhorts taste by Chris Holder 54
Disregarding wisdom by Jessica Marshall 54

Contents continued

Canyon 47 by Wendy Johnson 55
iSoul by Mary Katherine Calderini 55-58
Montevallo sunset by Cori Clark 58
The Beaumont Hotel trophy wife by Andrew Cromer 59-63
I am the lion of Oz by Asha Butler 64
The Malayan tiger by Jeremy Black 64
Magnolia lane by Mary Katherine Calderini 65-66
A hiccup in productivity by Joseph Whitt 67
The waters you once splashed in by Lily Elmore 67
Us vs. them has little to do with you and I by Nathan Harper 68
The waiting room by Jessie Russell 68-71
Sempiternal by Chantel Clubb 71

On as yet unmade decisions

By: **Lily Elmore**

I have not decided.
Some may say the decision
White American Female
was made for me.
That I should be happy.
That I'm lucky.

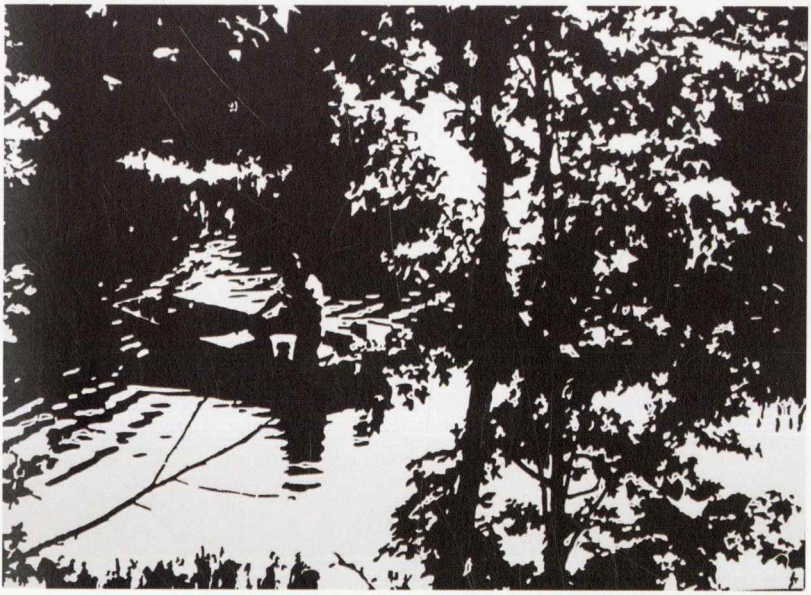
But I have not decided.
There are factors of genetics
My skin color and my sex
Factors of my fathers and mothers
Both native and immigrant
Yet, I am in charge

I am in charge of my own portrayal
I dream of betrayal
Of leaving my home

The sweet smell of mystery breezes
in from across the sea.
I long for greater history
for the setting of my own story

I hope to escape the swarm
Independent of past and norm
Run from the cozy, easy, and warm
To weather through a unique storm

There are things I cannot change
That I wouldn't want to change, too.
But I choose how I create myself.
I will define my race, my gender, my identity.
The choice is up to me.



Morning reflection/ **Kimberly McWhorter**

Confetti

By: **Issac Nunn**

Normal girls poop

By: **AKL Waites**

She's thin, too thin. All of her parts end in jagged points. Her bones protrude in awkward spaces, her hips, her ribs, her thighs, her collar. Every bit of her is clearly visible. All of what lies beneath her greying skin is observable from the surface. She is bare. She is vacant. She is pathetic. Her clouded hazel eyes stare complacently ahead, comatose. Don't look too hard. Nothing lives there. Not anymore. Dark purple splotches fill her hollowed out eye sockets and match perfectly with the long lines of track marks that snake their way down the insides of each of her arms. Her hair is a dull lifeless shade of blonde. The limp strands fall just past her shoulders. A few stray pieces cling to the sides of her face, sticking to the cold sweat that covers the surface of her pale skin. Her chapped, blistered lips minutely but erratically quiver. She's scared. You're scared. She's lost. She's sick. A single tear escapes from her sunken eye. It trickles down the emptiness of her forgotten cheeks and across her dry trembling lips. That's it. You can't escape the truth when it's right in front of you. A sad girl, naked and alone, standing in the middle of her one bedroom apartment, crying over the truth. You cannot pretend forever, sweetie. There she is. Mirrors don't lie. Help her. It has to stop. You have to stop.

The supplies are gathered, a precarious pile of necessities sits on top of your tiny powder blue kitchen table: six cans of Chef Boyardee ravioli, you will get hungry, four gallons of purified water, you will get thirsty, a twelve pack of ultra-strong toilet paper, and a three gallon plastic paint bucket, you will definitely not regret those last purchases. The insignificant collection of items seems to fill up the make shift kitchen. You make your way from the full length mirror, propped up against your bedroom wall, to the gathering of essentials. Let her be. She'll be there all night. As you grasp the bucket, your hands shake with such intensity that the bottom of the empty vessel rattles against the metal table. The clock on the stove reads nine seventeen p.m., just last the night. Just make it to morning.

Your stomach releases an appreciative grumble, or does it? It feels lower than it should. It feels more urgent than it should

The smell of over seasoned tomato sauce and processed pasta fills the air. The spoon clangs against the inside of the aluminum can you slam the can onto the table. Three down and three to go, but the clock on the stove reads it to be only eleven thirty-five p.m., slow down. Your stomach releases an appreciative grumble, or does it? It feels lower than it should. It feels more urgent than it should. Uh-oh. You race for the bathroom, swiftly grabbing the pack of toilet paper on your way out of the kitchen. Your cheeks slam against the porcelain seat just in time. You give yourself a mental high five for deciding to remain

naked for the rest of the night. Every second is precious. As the chorus of splashes begins, you let out a long cathartic, raspy sigh. Better, much better. Everything is becoming normal. Normal girls eat. Normal girls poop. They don't spend their days, strung out and constipated struggling to remember the last time they ate. Normal girls poop.

You sit on the end of your bed clutching your phone with both hands. Your constantly wavering thumb skims across the touch screen, initiating the various interfaces. Messages. The clock on the phone reads midnight. Noah. You skip back to the older messages, the ones before the fights, and the drugs, and the other girls. You skip to November 5th when he said, "All I'll ever need is you," and October 17th when he said, "Goodnight my love, my other half in all things." The sweet words don't change the ending, the ending changes the sweet words. The goodbye on May 23rd irreversibly alters the hello on September 2nd. Nothing to be done, but read and catch the tears on your lap as they fall from your chin.

You wake in panic, but you're not sure why. Your skin crawls, parts of you itch, and something's coming. You're anxious. There's a sharp pain in your abdomen and a bubbling in your belly. Something's coming. Realization hits. You snatch the bucket from beside the bed and hastily shove your head inside. Something's coming. You wait. At first, it seems like nothing is going to happen, but, in an instant, that all changes. You watch, in sheer horror, as three cans worth of slightly digested ravioli makes its way out of your mouth, slamming against the bottom of the bucket. The smell of tomato sauce and pasta has taken on an extra flavor in its newly reemerged form. When the retching finally ceases and the bucket is returned to its original position, you make the journey to the bathroom and rinse the splash back vomit particles from your hair. The clock on the stove reads one twenty-two a.m.

The metallic bed frame squeaks and squawks with every twist and turn. The sound pierces through your skull, it violently grasps hold of the inside of your temples and wrenches the nerves that dwell there. If you would only stop moving. Just stop moving! But you can't. The shakes have grown into compulsive, belligerent, full body spasms. Cold, sticky sweat covers both yourself and the mattress, adding continues shivers to the already erratic jerky movement of your body. The clock on the stove reads three a.m. There's a man, five blocks down the street, standing on the corner. You know he's there. He's always there. He has what you need, and maybe you'll go see him. The thought sounds nice, peaceful even. You could end this now. Just go for a quick walk. If only your limbs weren't so twitchy. If only your body wasn't so heavy. If only your head wasn't so murky. If only your eyes would stop closing. You should probably just sleep anyway, sweetie. Forget about the man on the corner and the sad girl in the mirror.

Everything is black. Everything, seen or unseen, is black, or is it all just unseen? But there is something, a speck, in the far off distance. Is there distance? There has to be, you're getting closer. Closer to what? It's yellow, or it has yellow in it. It's still too far away to tell.

Your pace is quickening. Are you walking? The thing is growing nearer, you must be walking. Is it orange? Yes, it's more orange. You have to know. You're sprinting. You're nearly there when you realize what there is. You slow to a walking pace once more. There, in the midst of this nothingness is a single, solitary ravioli. single, solitary ravioli.

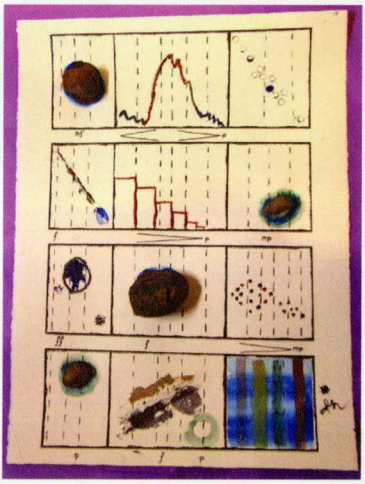
Everything is bright, too bright. The sunlight barges its way into the sanctity of the apartment, ruining everything it touches, making the world harsh. You blink a few times and run your eyes. The clock on the stove reads eleven a.m. You force yourself out of bed and across the room. The girl in the mirror is still too thin, her hair is worse than before, and her skin is still grey, but her eyes are different. There's something behind them today. A smirk plays at the corner of her lips, and her eyes play along, as well. She has hopes and dreams and all of those greatly vague, big kind of things, but she also has ravioli and poops and all those perfectly specific, small sort of things.

In lieu of leaving

By: **Wanda Wesolowski**

Ask my favored mother.
She'd say I'm an electrical storm.
She'd say thunder clouds
my timbre—
carries cross counties
into places I've
not been before but
plan to see one day.
Ask my former lover.
He'd say that I am cirrus.
He'd say I have a learning
curve—
it took too long
for him to climb up here,
to join me in the clouds,
to capture sanguine sunsets.
Maybe just ask me.
But don't ask who I am;
instead, ask how I felt when
Love finally showed up
at my door, sopping wet
from a sun-shower, still singing
songs of thunder—
ask me that.
Okay then. How did you feel?

Look in the box beneath my bed:
you'll find emergency funding
for a former fugitive who once
swore herself to sovereignty—
Look in the passenger-seat beside me:
you'll find a boy who wants
to see the world alongside a girl
who wants the world to see him.



Composition 1: in memory of John Cage / **Joel Nelson**

Free at last/ **Robby Wise**

Realism

By: **Rebekah Koen**

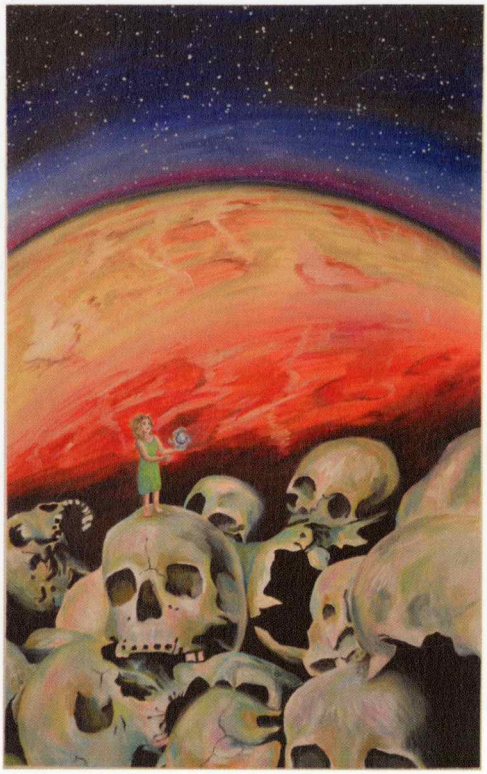
I look at you and all I see is guilt
Those pretty brown eyes now look at me with betrayal
Your wide set nose is narrow and turned down at me
And your smile…
That sweet and loving smile is now a sneer
Your teeth are crooked with my lies
Your brown sugar skin
Mine to touch
Mine to know
Mine to tease
Is now black with hatred and held back from me
And if you looked into a mirror you'd think that nothing changed
And if wishes were horses I'd find someone to blame
But sweetie that glass only shows the past
And my eyes only see how you should be treating me
What we need is a dose of reality

Kalopsia

By: **Jessie Russell**

A vulture caws
encircling an abandoned boat left out to dry,
gritty earth sinks below its major mass,
flattening the desert flowers below me like
tortillas, ringing them down-to-stem.

But where can I stand at the edge of the road
where the asphalt is crumbled to ashen-stone
and the sidewalks chalky, white brush dust
spatters on my breast bone, and my hands
extend politely toward the sixty-foot drop
down straight to the nest of the succubus
known for flesh-shredding fallen lovers
it happens time and time again, it was



I will not stay/
AnnaLeah Comer

entirely too predictable on my part, I
confess. On a small, round table sits
a silver spoon, a china-white bowl
chipped on one side like a V-cut,
I perch on a wooden tripod with
upholstered fabric squeezing its
cushioning, on the table, a bare
bowl, as I scoop out its basin,
empty molecules dropping
onto the floor. And then, I
see a raven, and a man lying
in the desert. Or, not a man, a
being whose face was wrapped
in a loose ribbon of gauze, save
only for the two holes where the
peering globes once rested, and the
pulsing waves felt their way through
the glass-melting heat, the streaming
celestial scorched cracked sand and torn
hems, sweltering distances, breathless breezes,
illusory bliss. The first time I heard the siren's song
I was floating upwards in placid ecstasy, my plasticity
melts, sagging skin-and-bone. Fleshy fumes saturate
the sky, clouding with hobbled urgency, they were
mere words on the page, and I blotted black with
ink-and-ash smears smooth on my porcelain,
enhancing all the necessary details with
purpose, I'll compose, flailing now
while I de com pose.

What happens while you stare

By: **Susannah Ritchey**

She laid there staring every day. It was never different. She stared out the window, at the sunshine and rain. She just kept staring until she was forced to blink and every blink meant that it was closer to being over- that she was closer to being home.

She shifted her head to stare at the bunk bed. She was supposed to sleep on the top bunk, but she never slept. She lay there staring up at the ceiling and cried. She cried and cried and cried. When her father came into her room to whisper goodbye, she closed her eyes and feigned sleep. But she could never sleep; the pillow was too wet and smelled of salt. She could never sleep, only stare.

She stared out the window never changing her expression.

One day she would find the strength to choose. She was alone even when she was not alone. One day she wanted to make it all stop, to stop staring. She didn't care about the pain because there was only pain, only pain when she stared. The heavens opened their gates and she held in her arms the sister no one would remember and her grandmother held her in her arms.

But she felt hell trying to pull her backward; a cold she would never forget. She had to choose. Choose between the cold and her pain. She chose the pain.

But the cold made her strong and she did escape. She escaped the staring, staring at the window.

But for now all she could do was stare, stare and dream of a prince who would make her blink.

One day she would meet a boy and that boy would make her stare. He would sweep her off her feet and she would feel. She would smile and cry and he would smile and cry with her.

She would have made a decision and he would be glad with her. Then she would get scared because she stared down at her arms and would see a baby, her baby, his baby, and she heard crying, crying that never ended, crying that wasn't real, wasn't yet, was hers, and she changed her mind because of what could be. He wasn't glad with her anymore.

Then she stared and she realized that all he wanted was to Get OFF and to Get HER and she wanted to Get OUT! So she did and she decided to be alone.

But right now she stared out the window at the rain, at the sun sinking down. She blinked and watched the sun blink goodbye, just staring.

And one day she would smile at her family, minus one father, and they would smile back at her, but their smiles weren't smiles, they were silent screams. Screams at her because they didn't understand, screaming at her because they had never had to stare.

So she went back, adding one father, and she sat and she smiled and she felt pain, and she stared.

And so she stared and she was eight and she stared and felt what it was like to be old, to shrivel and die. She stared at the window not letting herself feel, not until she was ready to hold the end in her hand, not until she stared at a baby, a ghost in her arms, not until she couldn't stare anymore and she blinked.

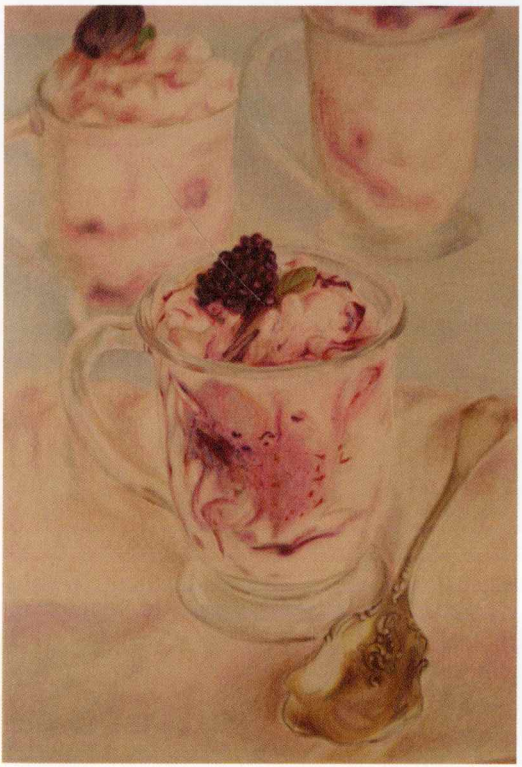
She blinked and she was grown, and there was no more innocence, had never been any innocence. So she stared, because there, there was a window, a window that could cry when she couldn't and the sun blinked for her and she just stared.

Open

By: **Abigail Betts**

My mother had some lilies
And, handing me a tiny vase
Said, "Here is a broken one,
Maybe it will open."
A broken flower
For this broken girl.
And maybe it will open.
But it mocks me
And joins me
In safely wrapping up
In lovely petals.

Glitter and death/ **Hannah Martin**



Parfait/ **Victoria Prosser**

Thoreau

By: **Abigail Betts**

They say I cannot just go-
But what do they know?
Do they know Thoreau?
Do they know why we go
Where footsteps are silent,
And the trees that fall
Never try to hide it.
It does not matter who is listening,
It is just the trees, Thoreau, and me.

A short reminiscence of my life

By: **J. Russell**

I am eighty years old today. Odd the things you remember where you're eighty; like how the honeysuckle smelt in the warm June air, or the August sun shining in the eyes of the pretty girl you loved. Odd the things you remember when you're eighty. I remember that cold December night; the winter storm of forty-nine, the snow blocking our path to the barn where we stored most of our firewood. We lasted on a prayer. I can still remember my six brothers and sister and I sitting around the living room fireplace listening to the old stories our grandparents once told our parents.

Funny the things you miss when you're eighty. I miss the fights my brothers and I would get into; the way she used to kiss me; I miss watching her drink her decaf black coffee every morning at 7 a.m. in the blue mug that read "number one mom" on the front. Funny the things you miss when you're eighty.

Today is August 7, 2015, and it's my birthday. Tomorrow will be August 8, the day Nellie died. Dead eighteen years, yet it seems like only yesterday we were teaching Tomas how to walk. Now he's grown and married, and my grandchildren, Ella and Bethany, are like Gods precious cherubim. They have children of their own now, but I do not know them. Funny the things life gives and takes from you. It gave me Nellie and a son and grandchildren. But life, fortune, memory, they took my precious grandchildren. Life stole my Nellie.

I am eighty years old today. And I am lonely. But oh, the things you remember. The things you miss, when you are eighty years old.

Father time

By: **Carla Smith**

I met a man on the corner of Main and Middle. He sauntered about with a sense of arrogance. How long will you be interested in the theoretical? He asked, steady and rhythmic—like the yippy bark in the distance, he had the same poetic purpose as Spot chained in the back yard.

We walked along. Pale, vinyl boxes lined the streets stuffed to the brim with worthless things, their porch lights dim in the grey of dawn, their wind chimes sway and cling to the breeze. There is a rhythm in drunkenness, in flowers, in words he mentions.

He is music seen in the consistent ticking of plastic clocks. The steady flap of patriotism on Julie's front porch. In the meticulous beats of spring. The inhale and exhale of cheap cigarettes. I, you, we, pulse to this unknown force, to the measures set by Him. Hear, see, feel, be, work hours, long and steady, distinguished, comfortable. The suffocating schedule of time. Unfortunately, there is a distinction between existence and infinity, and you, my friend, you are numbered.

All the better I retorted. He then dissolved into the morning light, leaving me to calculate how long I

Hung by nails

By: **Keshia McClantoc**

Lately, I have found myself haunted by my own dreams. In them people have to throw up every mean thing they have ever said, every profanity to ever pass through their lips, every sneer at an unknowing neighbor. It started first with a preacher, in the triumph of sermon he lurched over, and with retching gasps let lose a splashing of ink and bile on the sanctuary floor. The ink spelled out the words; the damning curses, the cruelness of man, even some of the messages he said in his own teachings, and then like the whispers of a thousand men, they disappeared.

And it spread, to every man, woman, and child on earth. Some suffered far less and some suffered far more. There was no explanation, no cure to be found. And so people panicked, not knowing when or where their own cruelty would spill out. Nothing they do could stop it. It was a purge of language, the very root of communication being cleansed of human poison.

Eventually the whole world was caught, everyone infected with their own corrupt sickness. And so they learned to be nicer, they learned not to let loose those mean words. For a little bit, it worked, it seemed to ease the flood of sickness that spread across the land. Everyone was happy, everyone was good.

The words they kept inside, so not to be punished through sickness, began to rot their very thoughts.

But then the words burned inside their brains. The words they kept inside, so not to be punished through sickness, began to rot their very thoughts. And the pain was unlike any other, with flames licking at all sides of their skulls. And the persistent ink, spilling from their ears, burned as the whispering of men, harsh words disappeared again. Some turned back to the old ways, letting every mean thought leave their brain, shouting their curses to the sky and in turn their meanness would expel, the ghastly vomit to ease the fire. It was the inevitable choice of picking their own poison, to live a life broken and distraught with sickness, or live with the ever burning fire blistering their mind. And no one was exempt, for humanity would always be plagued by their own cruelty.

Except me.

This was always the worst part, the part when they would notice me, their broken faces full of hatred, casting their dark glances toward me. And they would ask why isn't he infected, by neither sickness nor fire, who is he? Why, they would ask, is the son of a whore and carpenter any different from us?

And I would want to tell them that I wasn't. I would want to tell them there would come the time when I was plagued by cruelty too, when the sickness would infect me so that beneath it I would be crushed. And they would be there for it too, the whole world watching while I perform, the darkness of human nature hanging me in the sky.

But I never could.

Because I would always wake up. my breath running fast. Because it was not time yet, that time is yet to come, when I'm older and wiser, when all of them have noticed me. When they'll see I'm not plagued as they are. And for that, they'll fear me, and for that they'll hate me, and for that they'll never see that I'm just an ordinary human. You'll have to forgive for my fear, you'll have to forgive my bitterness, you'll have to forgive me for all the flaws that fill my very veins. Because that's just how you made me—as an ordinary, broken human.

I'm never still for long, in the morning, with sunlight making all the dark corners recede. After every dream I watch the slow recession of the darkness, and I'll count the measures of time, every second closer to the hour that will eventually come. And then will be my father's voice, asking me if I'm awake, asking me if I'm ready.

And despite of everything, I'll have to answer, "Yes, Father, I am."

Sound of solitude

By: **Mary Catherine Fehr**

Quiet

By: **Giselle Casadaban**

Life, and the quiet parts of it.

That is what he told me to write about.

And I wonder how he could talk about quiet when all I can hear is cars honking, and teachers lecturing, and pencils tapping, and the voices in my head that yell so loudly when I have an exam, and the whirr of construction, and the clanging of utensils, and the ringing of a thousand telephones.

But I try. Honestly.

I think.

The first thing I think of is the feeling of sheets. How different they feel in the morning rather than at 3:00 AM.

At 3:00 AM, they can smell like beer and cigarettes and the sweat of a night you won't forget (or maybe you will). They can feel like insomnia. They can feel like a snake, coiling around you. They can feel damp from tears that stemmed from the frustration of being alone for so long.

Mornings are different, though.

Some mornings, sheets feel like an embrace.

An embrace you've needed for a long, long time, but haven't gotten from anyone.

Sometimes they feel stifling, like a crowded room, and you can't wait to get out.

Sheets are quiet. But they speak, too.

I think about the sound of my footsteps on the road to the library. How I tap out rhythms of songs with my feet that only I can make out.

I think of moments when it's so cold that I can't feel my fingers, or my ears, and I see my breath swirl out in front of me and I try to remember what warmth even feels like. Or when exactly air had a taste or a smell, because suddenly it does, and it feels like poison, but I keep breathing—in and out, in and out—because it may very well be poison but it's poison that I need. It's like a drug that you know you shouldn't have but you keep breathing, breathing, breathing.

Air is like a drug. That isn't very quiet.

But then I wonder if maybe the quiet parts of our lives are the loudest.

Maybe the breaths that you hear from the person sleeping next to you say so much that it's like a novel spinning out of their lungs. So many phrases desperate to escape but they're not words, they're air, so you settle for leaning back into their chest and breathing in the sentences.

Maybe the quiet cups of coffee in the morning that taste so bitter on our tongues are actually the loudest parts of our day.

A step.

A word.

A quiet song on the radio.

The sound of the car starting on the way to work.

The feeling of a touch grazing skin.

Breathing.

Heartbeats.

Maybe all of that is louder than we think. Maybe it's trying to tell us something.

But we continue on our paths of commuting and singing and studying and laughing and getting drunk at 2:00 in the morning on a Tuesday the night before our finals, or driving down a dark street with the windows down in January, singing along to that song from the 90's as loud as we can.

Maybe we drown them out with even louder things.

But maybe we should stop.

And listen to what the quiet has to say.

A response to a dream deferred

By: **Milissa Richardson**

I know what happens to
a dream deferred
Ive seen it before...
Caught on a reed by the
side of the road
Torn
and
tattered,
Now thread bare and
hollow
It flaps and spins in the
aching wind
But it is the birthing
soul
That is found thirsting
Its heart grows brittle
From the want
It festers
but only as the echo
grows
...what
might
have
been?
A better thing,
If it could be lanced
and the wonder relieved

So sweet at its creation
It taunted the tongue
Taste me! Consume me
whole!
It would surely seep
with over flow
But fear paralyzes
and the calling
never
embraced
The dream abandoned
...with no sustaining
source
Tragically,
its fragrance is lost
Nearly forgotten in the
distance of time
It
is
Weightless...
Unpursued...
No longer tethered
And left to float
away
in an aimless
breeze
Ive seen what happens
to a dream deferred
If only its thin, orphaned fragments

Overgrown/ **Amy George**

The asteroid's impact

By: **Taylor Dellinger**

August 2010

They are all right. When we're young and free, we think we're invincible and then BAM, all the talks in the Auditorium and Health class become truth. You become that statistic, that 1 in 100. You aren't invincible, you never were. And how stupid was I to think for one second, that I would be an exception?

October 2010

Astrid. Astrid. Astrid. Asteroid. I am an asteroid, weightless, light in theory and heavy on impact. I have a path that I am hurtling down, fixed on my destination, destruction my only real outcome.

I hate this. Hate it. Hate it.

November 2010

It isn't as worse as it will be, and it will definitely get worse, that's what I've read anyways. No one outside of Mom and Dad and my brother Roger know. And I almost wish they didn't know.

December 31, 2010

The doctors don't tell you that when you get sick that suddenly, your friends don't want to see you. Mostly, they stay away due to fear of somehow catching what you have, no matter how impossible it is. Or the ones that do come around, they look at you like you are the last puppy in pound, taking you home because you were the only option. They have pity for you, nothing more or less. The doctors don't tell you that getting sick and being sick are the loneliest feelings on the planet. You don't really have friends. Family treats you carefully, like a broken bone that's trying to heal. The doctors, well, they look at you like another name that may or may not still be on their charts a few months from now. You are alone. I am alone. As if being a teenager wasn't hard enough already.

June 15, 2011

Since this has been progressing so quickly, we had a family meeting about all this, how it's going to impact the family as a whole. I just sat on the living room couch and listened second-handedly and nodded when I was expected to. All I could think about was that word "impact." A word that signifies some sort of impression made, some kind of destruction or creation made on another person. My impact is destructive, but my family only talked about the creation. I can't find the creation that will come from my impact. There is no beauty in what is happening, in what I'm making my family go through.

June 22, 2011

It's been a week. I couldn't make myself leave the bed for much of anything, which of course made Mom and Dad concerned. She told me to write in here more and that we'd go clothes shopping tomorrow. She thinks it'll help me feel normal again. We'll see about that.

June 23, 2011

I'd never tell Mom this, but going out and doing "normal" things didn't feel normal at all. It felt like we were putting a Band-Aid over it all to hide the damage. Mom had me try on a whole bunch of clothes.

And it was when I was pulling on a new shirt that I saw myself in the mirror, a sick, shriveled up version of my old self, the new clothes were just another Band-Aid.

June 30, 2011

I spent another week in bed again; it's all too much sometimes. I feel like I am sinking further and further down, slithering down this hole of discontentment and disease. At least being on the verge of death means no more school.

August 10, 2011

I have been stuck in bed again. This time it was due to treatment, it makes me very sick. But this time when I went to treatment, there was a boy who sat next to me. He looked drugged and half alive, that's what treatment does to you, it heals you by slowly taking small bits of the life that's still in you. His brown hair caught my eye due to his super pale face, a look I knew all too well. He kept doing this weird thing where he'd look at me and smile and then look back at the wall, which made him look like an idiot and made me concerned that I too, looked like an idiot somehow.

August 17, 2011

I went in for treatment again today. No matter how many times I go, I will never get used to the after effect. The vomiting and feeling so tired that I could sleep for the rest of my life or the feeling of the medicine crawling through my veins, attempting to make me well again. It's all so exhausting. Being sick is like a full time job, trying to get your body healthy again takes up so much of my time. When treatment was finally over and the nurse was walking me back to the waiting room where my Mom was, I passed the idiot boy from last time, he was coming in for treatment too. We stopped and talked for a minute, but I felt like I was going to throw up if I spoke anymore and left. It was really nice to see him again. His name is Trevor.

August 23, 2011

I went to treatment once again this week, this time it wasn't so bad. That same idiot boy was there and this time we talked some more. Trevor, like me, suffers from Nephroblastoma, which is just a fancy medical name for cancer in the kidneys. Lucky him, his is only at Stage 2, good ole curable Stage 2; I would kill to have mine be at Stage 2. We talked about music, The Smiths particularly, and he told me about some TV show called Doctor Who. He was funny and seemed to care more about what I was into than how I feel about my cancer. In fact, cancer only came up once. For a few minutes today, it felt like I wasn't sick at all. Plus, he's really cute, like lip-biting, constantly nervous around him cute.

September 1, 2011

Today was a good day and a bad day. When I woke up this morning, I went straight to the bathroom to get ready to go to treatment. When I looked in the mirror, I saw my scraggly, mostly gone red hair, expect now, there was another huge patch gone and my head looked naked on one side. I called out for Mom and she came in and hugged me. She left and came back with the electric razor and shaved the rest of the hair off and I couldn't help but cry. I was bald. It was a moment I knew was going to happen, but had hoped would be postponed for a while longer. My hair was my last real connection to my life before I got sick. Now, I would constantly

be wearing my sickness. Also, I was going to see a slightly cute, idiot boy and I was bald. As if being a teenager wasn't hard enough, dumb cancer has to make it worse. I moped for a while and then resigned to getting the rest of me ready. I went to treatment and he was sitting in the waiting room when I walked up. He looked surprised and I knew it was because of my bald head. And then he said "You look really pretty. Personally, I think hair is overrated" and I felt much, much better.

September 4, 2011

I haven't talked to Trevor or anyone in a few days. I can't seem to make myself be around people, not anyone, not even my family. I've even skipped 2 treatment sessions. I've shut myself away in my room. This feeling started the other day when I went for a check-up at the doctor. I don't know why, but I was hoping to hear good news. I assumed that because other things were going well, like meeting a cute boy that it was some sort of sign for an even greater thing to happen. I was wrong. The doctor came in with this look on his face, a look of "lost cause", which I was aware that I was one, but still. He told me that my Nephroblastoma had progressed into Stage 4, meaning that the cancer has used my blood as a highway to spread to my brain. I've never seen my Mom cry so hard. It scared me. It scared me more than the cancer. My asteroid was getting closer to its impact. And that scared me even more. I could almost see it colliding with my family and leaving an Astrid shaped impression on them for the rest of their lives. I was causing Mom to cry. I was going to cause a lot of people to cry all because my kidneys were defective and dumb and got cancer and then decided to share with my brain. This was my fault. So I decided to hide myself in my room in order to try and shelter people from my impact.

September 12, 2011

Mom forced me to go to treatment today. They upped my dose. When the medicine started to slip into my veins, it was like someone swapped the medicine with bleach. I was burning from the inside out. Trevor came in for treatment too. I didn't want to talk to him, but he couldn't take a hint. He kept asking where I was the last few days. And I couldn't take it. My "I can do this alone" façade dropped so fast. It all just came out of me before I could stop it. I told him about how I was an asteroid on its way to crash into my family, about my cancer progressing, how I care less about dying and more about what happens to my family after I've died. And I cried too. Not cute crying either, more like heavy, snotty crying. And he just sat there and listened and nodded. And then he said something amazing. I had him repeat it so I could write it in here. He said, "Astrid, whether you die tonight or 60 years from now, your family is going to be impacted. Your asteroid, as you call it, will hit eventually. You can't avoid it. No one can. All you can do is make the impact worth it. Make it mean something." And I think he's right. He's completely right. When he said it, I felt relieved. I felt like I needed to take the time while I'm still here to make my impact worth it instead of making my impact a miserable one by default. I calmed down after a while. And then he did something no boy has ever done before, he held my hand.

September 20, 2011

Today I decided to do something that would make my impact worth it. So I waited for Roger to come home from school and asked him to play video games with me. We played for hours and he told me about school and this girl he likes. He made so many fart jokes that I laughed so hard and got a stomach ache, but it was worth it. I want to do this more.

September 23, 2011

Today I tried to do something else that would make this all worth it. I spent the last few days watching every episode of Doctor Who that I could get my hands on so that when I saw Trevor at treatment I could let him ramble on about the show and I would actually understand what he was saying. But when I got to treatment and the needle was lodged into me, I waited and waited and Trevor never came. The disappointment was worse than the medicine.

September 30, 2011

I went to treatment again. This time Trevor was there. And I asked him where he had been. He told me how he had been at a check-up with his doctor. He told me that his doctor wanted to go schedule a surgery for January so that they could go in and get all the tumors off his kidneys. Such a wonderful thing to hear, but he didn't seem happy. He told me he was nervous about the surgery. What if they didn't get all the tumors? What if the cancer came back? The chances are slim, but what if? I let him go on and on. And when he was done, I did what he once did for me when I was in a similar state, I held his hand.

What if they didn't get all the tumors? What if the cancer came back? The chances are slim, but what if?

November 1, 2011

Today it is all too much. I can't face the world, living and bustling, when I am dying. I can't deal with it today. Today, I want to do my dying alone.

November 5, 2011

After I spent many days moping in bed about my impeding death, Mom reminded me of what Trevor said, about making my impact worth it and that sort of helped me get out of that state of mind for a while. So I did something I've never done before. I went to treatment today and let the nurse hook me up to the medicine and watched Trevor get hooked up too. When we were alone, I made my move. I asked him to come over to my house for dinner tomorrow and he said yes. The rest of the treatment was spent exchanging smiles and nervous giggles.

November 6, 2011

Trevor came over for family dinner tonight and officially met my parents. Mom likes him, I think even Dad does too. Dad did the typical "What are your intentions, young man" nonsense, but I think Trevor's answer won him over. He said "To allow her some happiness." Mom melted at that. He and Roger even played basketball in the driveway after dinner. Things are okay. Things are good. My life is good, despite everything else. I need to remember that.

November 12, 2011

Family dinner with Trevor has become a bi-weekly thing. Afterwards, he'll chat with my parents or play

videogames with Roger. Then he'll come with me to my room and we'll talk about music. I showed him my records. He showed me his iPod. We'll listen to music and he'll make me laugh by telling me really bad knock-knock jokes, like the ones you find on candy wrappers. But tonight was different. Tonight he asked me to go on a walk with him. We walked around the neighborhood for a while and didn't talk. Then we stopped walking and he faced me and kissed me. My first kiss. It was wet and weird and so nice. And then it was over and we were walking back to my house. When we got to the front door he faced me again and kissed me more. This time was still wet, but even nicer. He said goodnight and got in his car and drove home. I walked into my house feeling like I was floating.

November 25, 2011

Happy Thanksgiving! Trevor came over for Thanksgiving dinner. We did the cheesy "go around the table and say what you're thankful for" thing. Mom and Dad were thankful for me and Roger. Roger was thankful for videogames. And Trevor was thankful for me, which made me blush, my parents smile at each other, and Roger made a gross, but happy face. I'm thankful for cancer, which made everyone silent and awkward. But I am thankful for cancer. Cancer made me depressed and so sick and so sad all the time, and still does quite often, but it brought me closer to my family. It brought me to Trevor. And Trevor taught me what impact was really about. Trevor and my family make me happy and this happiness all started with cancer. So,

The doctor admitted me and gave no sign that I'd be leaving the hospital anytime soon

I am thankful for it.

December 12, 2011

Trevor and I have been hanging out almost every day outside of treatment days. Today we went to the hospital where we get treatment and see our doctors to visit with some of the younger children suffering with cancer. We got to play games with them and talk with them and it was so good to watch these kids be oblivious to the IV's or the G-tubes in their stomachs and just be happy despite it all, to still go out and live. It made me want to go out still live while I can. It was such a good day. Trevor and I made plans to go back as much as possible.

December 15, 2011

Sometimes, it's really hard to get out of bed. Today is one of those days. I want to just lie in bed and give up, let the cancer win, let it all go and just let my impact happen. On these kinds of days, my family and Trevor remind me why I can't let it happen yet. It can't happen yet because I am still here, I am still alive, and I am still fighting.

December 20, 2011

Things have taken a turn for the worse. I got really sick the other night, my kidney felt they were bursting open. Mom and Dad had to rush me to the emergency room. The doctor admitted me and gave no sign that I'd be leaving the hospital anytime soon. I'm hooked up to all kinds of tubes, attempting to drain some of the cancerous fluid out of my kidney and replace it with medicine. Mom and Dad take turns staying with me, sleeping in the ugly green plastic

chair. Roger visits a lot too. He brought me his PS3 to play with, which was a huge thing for him to do. Even some of the kids that Trevor and I have spent time with have stopped by with little cards. Trevor visits a lot too and we listen to his IPod and he talks about Doctor Who some more. He brought a DVD set of the show the other day and we watched it for hours, it's actually a really good show. Sometimes Trevor just sits there and holds my hand because I feel like if I move, I'm going to vomit or pass out. He looks concerned, so does everyone, even the nurses and doctors. But I'm trying to stay positive. I'm making jokes and trying to stay upbeat. I am still here and I have to make the impact worth it. I have to.

EPILOGUE

My Dearest Astrid,

My daughter, upon finding your journal and skimming through several entries, I want you to know that I think you're wrong. You were not an asteroid. An asteroid is something Earth and humanity dread and fear; it is a hunk of rocky destruction. You were never that. I rather like to think of you as rainstorm in the middle of a drought. The raindrops slam into the Earth, returning it back to life, giving it something it desperately needed. That's what you are. Your raindrops fell on this family and nourished us to think of our own raindrops and what they do when they finally fall. You gave us life, Astrid. Because of you, I remember to find comfort in Roger and Dad. I try to face things and not cover them up with Band-Aids. My whole life is new because of the way your raindrops fell. And I know those raindrops will continue to fall on us, Trevor, and the kids from the hospital. You did good things while you were here. And your "impact" gave life to so many people who needed it. Thank you, my precious rainstorm. I miss you every day, but I take comfort in the last memories I have of you, fighting and trying every day to make all this matter.

And it does matter. So much. Please know that.

I love you always,

Mom

My lovely Astrid,

The house feels weird without you in it. I miss you more than I thought was humanly possible. There are some days where I would go and sit in your room and just miss you. Then mom found your journal and I realized you wouldn't want that to be the impact you made on me, so on those days when missing you is too much, I started volunteering at the hospital with the same kids you and Trevor did. There's so much love in those kids, so much happiness, despite everything happening to them. I'm trying to make my own impact worth it. Feeling this, the need to at least try, would not have happened without you. Your impact gave us all something new, though nothing could ever replace you. Thank you for helping me, for making me try. You are my motivation behind everything I do.

I love you,

Dad

Astrid,

At first, everything was empty without you here. Dinners were awkward and nothing felt right. You talked about making your impact after you were gone, but you made it while you were still here. You were always laughing at something, you filled the room with

your presence, now that you're gone, and nothing feels right. And maybe it never will because that place you created can never be filled. But it does get easier to bare. Those nights we played video games and we got to just talk have stuck with me. They are my favorite memories. I wish we could have made more, but I'm so glad you don't have to feel that pain anymore. I'll go on to make more memories and dad, and while the room will feel empty without you, I know you'll be there with us. Stay with us, please. I love you.

Roger

Astrid,

Your impact occurred. You hit swiftly, but not unexpectedly. So much has happened and I wish I could talk to you about it all. January 12th, the day of my surgery, the day the doctors got all the tumors off my kidneys, was the day you died. There's life in death, I suppose. But I do not wish you had more time. You did not deserve to suffer one more single day. Your asteroid is now free to fly wherever you please. But I do miss you. And I know we didn't have much time, but I loved every second of it. No matter how much time passes, like the way the ocean calls to a boat, I always come back to you and your impact you left on me. I promise you, that in my remission, I will spend my days making it worth it. I will go out and live and help others the way you helped me. I will. I promise. I'll make you proud.

All my heart,

Trevor

Innocent beauty

By: **Jeremy Black**

She and I

By: **J. Russell**

Painting and writing are not unalike. Both author and artist create stories. "A picture's worth a thousand words," someone once told me. They were right. I write, she paints. We both tell our stories, share our ideas. We have our techniques. We have our comfort zones. I write, she paints.

Today, I saw her sketching on a blank canvas an idea that had come to her in the night. I asked her what she was painting. She replied, with slight agitation, that it was a forest with a creek running through, over the rocky and moist sedimentation. I looked at her skeptically. I saw rough pencil sketches. Nothing better than a proud third graders masterpiece. I shrugged and walked away.

Time went by. I had forgotten her painting in progress, until one warm spring day when crayons again became a necessity meaningless and unnecessary homework. As I rummaged through her room, I caught a glimpse of unusual color coming from the hall window in her room. At the end of the hall there stood an easel; and on it, a beautiful acrylic, canvas painting. A small forest. There is a creek, small and fervent; the observer looks from within the forest out into a small field where a wooden fence stands. The greens in the leaves are perfectly blended and shaped. The blues in the creek are extraordinary. I feel as if I am really there.

She has created a masterpiece. My mind has written a novel. She prefers a brush, I like a pen. We both use our imagination; pour our heart and soul into each piece. We are determined. We are creative. Sisters in sync. We are individuals. We. Are. Artists. I write, she paints.

Night

By: **J. Russell**

When the nights grow cold and dark
I often remember you
Remember your
Eyes
Hands
Heart
When the nights grow cold and dark
I often think of you
Think of
The way it was
The way it could've been
They way it should've been
When the nights grow cold and dark
I do not dream of you
I Dream
Not of happiness
Not of security
Not of anything at all
When the nights grow cold and dark
I dare not speak of you
For fear you might
Steal my heart
Once
Again

Burn

By: **Heather Wade**

After my last class on Friday, I grab a bowl and a box of matches and sit on my windowsill. It's a pretty day today. The sun is shining and the birds are chirping. And the newly lit bowl in my hand turns this day flawless. I inhale and exhale the first fumes of the day. It's times like these I'm glad I don't have a roommate. I'm a freshman in college without any worries in the world. I bring the bowl up to my lips once again to calm my mind.

I take a peak at the sky outside my window. It looks as if it will rain. I put away the bowl to save for tonight.

I get excited with the thought of tonight. The girl I've had my eyes on for a month is coming over tonight thanks to my best friend, Kara, who introduced us last week. Her name, Charity, is innocent, but dangerous. Her eyes are as blue as a crystal ocean and her wavy hair falls down to her shoulders. Her smile shimmers even in the darkness. And the best thing about this girl; her favorite thing in the world is hot chocolate. She drinks hot chocolate in the summer just like it's cold outside. I cannot completely describe my feelings for this girl because it is the first time I've ever had these feelings. I can't put into words what I feel inside. I know my parents would think this crush is wrong of me. But if I am wrong, then fuck being right.

My parents have taught me well the difference between what is wrong and what is right, but in the process I have taught myself that I don't really care if I am wrong or right. I do as I please. When I lived at home, my parents always taught me that sex is wrong and alcohol is wrong and everything pleasurable is wrong. Whose standards is this? Who says it is so bad to do these things? They thought that sending me to an all girls' school would keep me out of trouble. And so far, they're right, but they have no idea how my thoughts are processed.

Stress starts swirling around in my body with every thought of my parents. I take out the bowl and finish it. And with the medicine floating around my system, I fall asleep.

I wake up a few hours later soaking wet. I look down at my gown and then outside.

"Fuck," I scream to myself. I left the window open and it rained while I was sleeping. It could be worse though. I could have fallen out the window, four stories down to my death. The thought scares me. I'm not ready to die.

I hear a knock at my door.

"Who is it," I yell.

"It's me," a familiar voice rings out.

I open the door to see my best friend, Kara, staring at me. "Hey."

"Why are you wet," she asks.

"Don't worry about it," I say. "Where is she?"

"Her and her best friend are coming in about an hour," Kara tells me.

I dry myself off and change gowns. I look over to see my friend watching. "What," I ask.

"Are you not going to wear a corset," she asks me.

"Hell no," I say.

She rolls her eyes at me then looks at her bag and reaches in. "I brought some cookies my mom made me."

"I got some hot chocolate because I know Charity likes it a lot," I say.

"How are we going to heat it," she asks me.

I walk around to my closet and pull out a burner and hold it up to her view. "With this."

"Cunningham, that's against the rules," my best friend tells me.

"What's going to happen," I ask her.

"Oh I don't know," she says in a sarcastic tone. "You could burn down the whole building. You're not the only one who lives here you know?"

"I'm not going to burn down anything," I assure her.

"Then why don't we just eat these cookies with milk? That's simple enough," she asks.

"I'm just trying to make a good impression is all," I tell her.

Kara realizes how happy I am with my new life in this industrial school. And she sighs because she doesn't want to ruin it even though she doesn't always agree with my brilliant ideas.

"I also have this," I say holding up a small, rolled piece of paper.

"Of course you do," she says with a smile. I know she always follows the rules, but this in my hand is her weakness.

Suddenly, I hear a knock at the door. I drop the joint in my pocket. I open the door to see those bright blue eyes staring at me. "Hey," Charity says.

"Hey come in," I try to say calmly.

"Cookie," my best friend offers to Charity and her friend who came with her.

"Sure," she says as she snags a cookie. She looks over at me. "I've heard some things about you."

My pale face flushes in embarrassment and wonder at what she heard. "Like what?"

"You're a rule breaker," she tells me in a wondrous way.

"Nah," I say in a small whisper.

She looks around me at the burner on the floor. "You sure?"

I snicker. "Maybe a little bit."

"A little bit," Kara asks.

I pull the rolled up paper out of my pocket. "Okay maybe I am."

Everyone laughs. Charity comes closer to my face and stares at me with those crystal clear eyes. "Me too," she says seductively.

My face turns blood red. The desire to kiss her is too strong, but I resist it for the sake of my audience. I turn around to my best friend who grabs the box of hot chocolate.

"Does anyone want some hot chocolate," she asks everyone.

"I'm more interested in what's in her hand," Charity says pointing at me.

I go around my perfectly made up bed and plug up the burner in the plug right next to the bed. I set it on top in the middle of the bed.

"Is that allowed," Charity's friend asks.

I ignore her stupid comment because the

white roll in my hand should tell this girl how much I do not care about the rules. I sit on my pillow on my bed and watch as Charity follows me to sit on the pillow beside me. Kara and Charity's friend follow to the opposite end of the bed. We all sit around the burner like a campfire. And with a small switch, I turn the burner on.

Charity smiles her beautiful smile as if she knows the party is starting.

I bring the white paper up to the burner and light it. I take a puff then I pass it to her. She takes it with pleasure and inhales for a few seconds then lets it out. After it has passed a full circle, it is passed back to me. Before I relight the paper, Charity brings her hand and puts it on my knee.

The nerves start to flow again, but this time with a curious mind as to how my night will end up. Once the other two ladies leave, I will have this room to myself with her. With nerves shaking my whole body, I lean into the flaming burner and light the joint. My heart skips a beat when I realize my hands are way too shaky to hold the burner still. I knock it over onto my bed and the girls scream and start running.

I try to pat down the flames with my nightgown, but it does not work. Instead it catches my nightgown on fire. And soon it reaches my skin.

The girls stand outside my room in shock as to what is happening to me.

"Help," I scream to them. But they just stand there and keep watching. The flames engulf my left leg. "Help," I scream even louder this time. I need help. Ow! It burns! "Help! Help!"

I start running down the hallway to see if anyone will help me. "Help Help!"

"Condie," Kara screams.

"Help," I yell to her as the flames creep up my nightgown to my abdomen. The pain is too unbearable to stand. I fall to the ground. The brightness of the fire slowly dims as I start to lose my vision. And just like that, everything is black.

Encountering a pegasus/ **Marissa Tom**

Catharsis

By: **Rebekah Koen**

When I was a little girl and I felt
overwhelmed
I
would go
outside
and
SCREAM!
Shout!
until my vocal
chords
were
raw. and aching...
cry,
until
my eyes
were
burning...
only stopping when my appearance
matched the tumultuous emotions
erupting
inside
of
me
howling...
with force enough to cause
the still trees to
shake their leaves
in empathy

the blue sky turned dark
as it absorbed my
sadness
a warning of on-
coming storm
so similar to
the one of my own minds creation
the winds would part the
clouds and somehow...
by disrupting the quiet nature of my
surroundings
I achieved
peace
of
mind
in my body; a calm would spread into
my heart and soothe
my soul
and i imagined the birds that flew
away
fleeing from the sound of my
anguish
were actually
taking
my pain
and carrying it
far
away
from
me.

Fragmented

By: **Sabrina Abrego**

Who we used to be

By: **Audrey Bearss**

The freshman. This is not a love story. This is my story about what should have been the best year of my life; the year I had no school, no band, and no car. Yep, the year I met the Freshman girl.

I was sick of high school life. I woulda dropped out. I really would. Mama didn't want though, so she gave me one more shot: homeschooling. Me and Mama have problems, but it had to be better than school. Anything was better than that. I figured all I had to do was read real hard for awhile then get out Walker County and never hear that name again.

In September though, I made a choice that was gonna bless and it was gonna curse me. I picked up my bass and joined the homeschool band. And yes, they have a band. I walked in planning to kill time, I walked out wondering if I was ever gonna be the same.

I was jamming on their P.A., digging their sound until their younger bass player began to growl at me. Growl, people, growl. Then I saw this B.A.M.F bass behind her, red with black ripples through it; I wanted it, I wanted it bad.

As the band teacher said they could go, she spun outta that seat and stood up; looking to kill me I'm sure for intruding on her turf. At the time, she did not have the mark of a freshman. Well, she never did, honestly that's probably why it all started. She was taller than me, but that's easy cause I stand 5' exactly. Yes the other guys make fun of me in case you're wondering. But hey, they weren't the ones getting looked over by this chick in skin tight skinnies, but with a baggy Bon Jovi hanging over her legs to preserve modesty of course, and looking mad as anything at life. I gave her a grin. It progressed madly from there. We had an instant communication of eyebrow twitches, half smirks, and head jerks as she went to sit back in the back and I proceeded to practice with my band group. Every time I saw that bass I made it clear to her that I wanted it. "You want it?" the Freshman mouthed to me holding it up to taunt me. I was jumping out of my skin trying to say yes. She grinned like fire "you can't have it" her lips read. The old band teacher got a kick out of it all.

She went and and sat down by Mama; awkward I know, but I didn't care. The fact that she was returning every bit of my flirting only drove me more. I would do anything to get her to look one more second.

Before I knew it, band practice was over, but she was leaving. The band teacher was talking to me, about how good I was, and how they could really use me and such; but she was leaving. "Hold on, I gotta catch somebody" I told him. I had to. I tore across that room, bass in hand and about ran into her, but poked her shoulder and laughed for who knows what reason. She turned though. She wanted to act aloof and mad. She wanted to, but she couldn't; she grinned. I managed my name and stupidly shook her hand. "It's very nice to

to meet you too" she said. Not even the Freshman could deny it now.

Returning back to my rightful place, I almost forgot the Freshman. But as I hit the malls and burnt up the roads in my buddy's beat up car, it wasn't right. Something was missing. It was dull. Freshman girl took the thrill so much nothing else had it anymore. So the second time I was really gonna talk to her. I had to see what this chick was all about.

There she was standing there again, looking angry at the world with that ripple red bass in hand. It was beautiful. I wanted a hug. Slinging my bass around my back I slowly walked up to her with my arms open wide looking like a toddler. She rolled her eyes speaking curses against all things male and hugs. " I wanna hug!" I wasn't letting her out without that hug. Once she got her own bass against her back she hugged me. And she was smiling.

I thought she was leaving, so as you can imagine I bit down and said dirty words in my head and stomped a few good times. Now the whole band knew.

After mouthing to me that she was leaving, I stuck out my lip and tracked a tear down my face then waved. But she came back! I was given a second chance by some force that I probably didn't deserve the praise of. I was watching that clock to 4:30.

So I got to talk to her for an hour. An hour of her looking and talking to me. And she liked it.

So I come slinking over there, trying my best at her way. "Yep" I kept saying over and over again as I sat shifting next to her. "Yep what?" the Freshman finally asked. I was frozen. "I'm awesome." "Ahhh" she said laughing. So I got to talk to her for an hour. An hour of her looking and talking to me. And she liked it. All I did was get, sit down, and swear a lot. Plus attempt to impress with my bass. I couldn't tell you a word of what was actually said.

Mama made me go, but she had my name. She had it in writing in her hand. I got me another hug too! I leaned into her more. She was a good hugger.

I swore against leaving. I couldn't rest until I felt sure she hadn't forgotten. I had to make sure she never forgot me.

We hung in the hallway some but we could barely wait for the big football game it was all working up to. And yes, they have football games.

The band practice before I teased her about stealing that bass. I wanted that thing even more.

"I'm watching you" the Freshman said leaning back in her fighter's stance pointing at me. Seeing her hand made me thing of the day we talked. She dug my hair all bleached blonde and jet black tips. The Freshman had touched the very edges. Barely even there.

I had a girlfriend a short time before the game. It was typical. She was a rowdy girl that I met at the mall. She'd come over and we'd make out on my couch.

But Friday, Friday I found myself in a middle of football field.

I had broken up with my girlfriend.

I walked out into their small set of bleachers and it was like thunder from these wild, free people.

There was a lanky chick stand there. But as I got closer, she stepped back to reveal the Freshman; who for the first time looked nervous. "I got all dressed up for you" I told her pulling on my zipper tie. The Freshman laughed "I see." I surveyed the scene of blue clad football players, ready cheerleaders, and all these unknown, homeschooled, kids.

Now they had to have their prayer. Their reverence and ferocity in the same moments was spellbinding. Church and me and never gone well. They judged and hated, I judged and hated. Me and God? That was still an awkward area for me.

Everybody started to close their eyes so I guessed I should, but I stole a glance at the Freshman. She had her head bowed. The Freshman was kneeling before a King. No earthly one though, of course. There was only one Man that the Freshman would ever serve.

She sprawled out in the bleachers with me laying next to her with my arm around her shoulders like I was her boyfriend. She didn't object, just gave me a cool smile. Then I got a weird idea. I made one of our band signals, but slide my finger a certain way to mean something else. I wondered if she would go down with me. But the Freshman just laughed at my cocked and questioning eyebrows and wide eyes. "Do I want to know?" The Freshman only served one man. "No" I said laughing with her "you don't."

Everyone came by to see the Freshman. Including a guy. I hated the guys being around cause I wanted her for tonight, even though she'd never be mine.

Half time came and she stood up to walk off. I caught up with her and got my arm around her again. This time she put her arm around me too. In front of everybody she knew. I noticed how everybody watched her. She was nothing more then some punk freshman chick, not popular, not noticeable, but they all did. Whether they knew why or not. She took off running after that. I ran right along behind her. She went to a playground and crawled into a rain washed orange. I hung back at first, but went in. The Freshman sat among millions of scrawlings, writings, and drawings. They all coated the tunnel.

"All these people...they are so close to finding everything and they give up." The Freshman didn't seem to be talking to me; but then again, maybe she was. "They hate the world, but not for the right reasons, they love, but not for the right reasons. Sad, sad, sad."

She reached up running her fingers over all the words and pictures. She gave that lightening grin. "Some get it though" she said tapping her finger over something on the faded orange side. I scooted over to see the words "Never Mind the Darkness, We can Still Find the Way..." marked above with a cross.

In the tunnel filled with who had been done here, cursing old other football teams before the Freshman's Eagles, and middle school spellings of nicknames, there was that.

The Freshman turned and looked dead into me. Staring back into the girl's eyes I saw it. As long as I lived I knew I'd see those eyes

burning for a life harder and faster than what the world could offer. And in that flaming grin I fell to the bottom of the Earth for the Freshman girl.

"I got a motorcycle" she said suddenly. "Yeah?" I asked, about to cry. The real thing. "Yeah, we call him Saint Jimmy; man, he's faster then time."

The Freshman let me scoot in against the October wind. I wanted to get close; to feel that she was real. Her whole body shook with the charging, throbbing beat of her heart. It was only a few minutes we sat in that tunnel but I'll remember those when a lot of others have faded I'm sure.

When she got up without warning to leave, we ended up nose to nose. I could have kissed her then. I really could have; she would have let me. To this day, I'm not a hundred percent sure why I didn't, but I believe it was because that moment was enough. I didn't care how about how she expressed it; I didn't need that. We knew the score.

After the game, we briefly sat on the hood of the Freshman's grandmother's car. I fell both in and out love for the first time looking at those stars. I wished on every one of them with her. Right there I knew that was the end of me and the Freshman girl. Mama came to get me before I knew it and it was over. That's why this isn't a love story. Love stories are about people who are perfect matches and arranged to grow old together. Love stories at the end of the day are all sap and not the grit and glory of life. Love stories are kisses in the rain and going to prom; not quiet space and Sharpie scrawled tunnels.

Me and the Freshman saw each other a lot after that still; but we both knew it was over. Today in the hallway outside of band I said good bye to the Freshman girl, even though those words would were never said. "You better get in there before you're late" she said. I gave her a final knowing grin, "you know I never cared about that. Never have, never will." The Freshman gave an understanding nod and a smile that let me know she'd miss me, but that's just how it was.

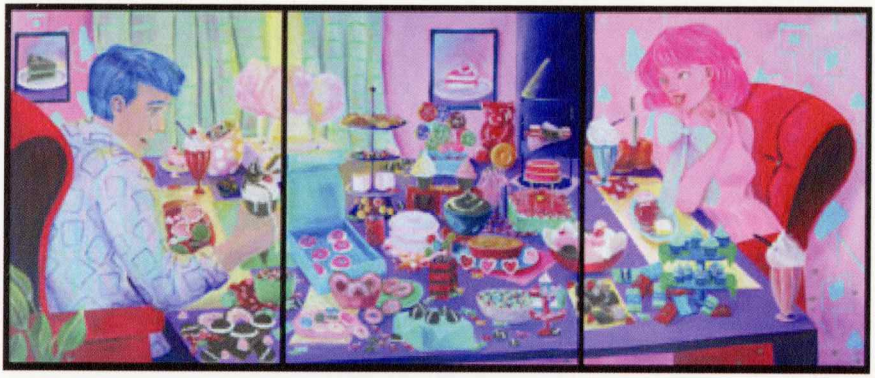
4:30 wasn't the same.

I'll probably never know what happens to that freshman girl, and she'll never know what happens to me. I do know one thing though, she wouldn't forget the grinning punk guy she saw when she turned around, looking to be angry at the world. Now, she'll never forget me.

Somerville

By: **Asha Butler**

Sugar/ **Amy George**



A broken crown

By: **Samuel Hollingsworth**

As I was heading for town, I got this sudden chill
A vision of me taking a tumble down a hill
It startled me for a moment, and then I marched on to pay my water bill
As I made my way to the post, I heard this piercing shrill
Someone was on a runaway bike, a girl by the name of Jill
She crashed right into me; it was an unpleasant thrill
My first thought, "was she mad? Did she mean to kill?"
"I'm sorry" she said, "I was in a hurry to get to the mill"
As I stood up I lost my balance, I grabbed her to try and keep still
I tumbled backwards onto an open mound and took Jill with me on this spill
As I fell I saw a mix of the sky, the grass, and the rustic old ville
I landed flat on on back in front of the oldest reporter, a man named Phil
Who quickly scrawled down something on paper with an old quill
I blacked out and awoke in the hospital with a bedside tray littered with pills
There was a large body cast mold and I was the fill
I apparently broke some bones and conked my head while falling downhill
A nurse came in and opened up the window and dusted off the sill
She told me that the Jill made it without a scratch; guess she had some tumbling skill
Before the nurse left she turned on the TV; the channel had on a documentary on krill
The channel suddenly broke away from the show to a segment called News Drill
The anchor man read that Carnival was underway in Brazil
And in local news man named Jack and woman named Jill tumbled down a hill
The newsman laughed and said it's too funny to be real
The nurse returned and said "Ok Mr. Jack, I'm back with your IV refill"

Forest fire

By: **Abigail Betts**

There's a painful melody at my feet. Over, and over, it sings in my ears with every step. My heart is on fire, and my lungs are burning with me. We're on fire, and we're chasing the flames. My legs join in the heat, and churn through the flames that lick my feet.

This is my beautifully perfect path. It's all in my head. I may be running still, but I see so many beautiful things. I'm not going anywhere, but I can see the woods. I'm not making any progress, but I'm climbing mountains.

I may be indoors, but I can smell the salt spray next to me.

It's a habit and it's my daily routine. It's a part of my routine on the day that is pure chaos. Everything around is turning to chaos and flames, but I have not noticed yet. I am just running. Maybe nothing could catch me.

As I stop to catch my breath, I swallow water to quench the heat, and I am foolish enough to breathe. And I see...and the melody changes. All the strings have snapped, all the soft beating has come to a screeching halt. The only sound is a cacophony of chaos pounding in my ears.

What does that screen above my head say? What is that name? I can see camouflage and flames...but is that his face? This is just another day.

My feet are stuck in thick trenches of discord, all of the beautiful melodies stuck jarringly in my head. Everything simply stops...There's a beautiful rest of heavy drama that detaches my mind. But it's all a lie.

And then my voice is screaming out loud. This is a terrible lie. Music is truth, and fire is honest, but this is a lie. Everything is off-pitch and unhinged.

I'm off of my running path through imaginary woods, and people are staring all around me. It's a blurry concrete room with flickering screens, but the words are real.

Even as I stand there screaming, I am running. With every breath that rips through my chest, I know that he surely still draws breath with me. We've always chased the fire together. He may have been a stride ahead, but I was always right behind him.

He had long legs. He was so fast...he could chase down the world if he wanted. His life is crashing headlong through flames.

Was.

Is.

Was.

I feel hands pulling at me attached to worried voiced, and my body falls into violent action. Now I'm going so far, and I've left everything behind me. The reporter with the fitted blazer is a liar.

I burst into the outdoors, and I see a real path ahead of me. Trees cut at my skin, and the air sears my throat and lungs. I love it so much. I love him.

Loved.

Love.

Loved.

There is green flashing all around me, which is a welcome change from the concrete. None of it is real. Surely, it's all just a darker pathway I've found. The melody transformed from flutes

and stings and found this richer, darker beat of screams and drums. And I beat.

He is always in green.

Was.

Is.

Was.

He left me in green.

I watch all the greens and browns flashing past me, and I think about how many have been consumed by flames and have been hidden in the trees for centuries. What kind of soul burns through trees? This fire has no soul. This fire is more than old. It's followed our men forever. And we have stayed behind to douse the remainders of flames that char the corpses of our sons.

But the flames are faster than me. He is always faster than me.

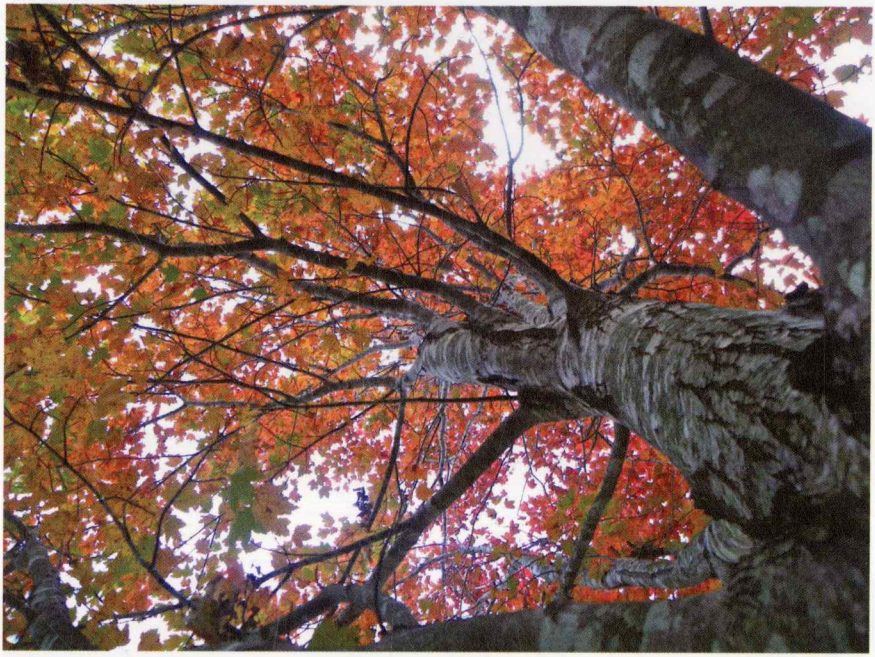
Was.

Is.

Was.

And the fire caught him, too. And it's burned us down. Now everyone will watch me burn, but no one will see the flames. No more than I'll see him again. No more than this world will see him again.

Look at this magic...I'm faster again. This path in my head is leading me somewhere I haven't been. It's somewhere he'll never go. It's somewhere generations of women have known.



Colors of fall

By: **Shannon Turek**

The unholy communion

By: **Arcadia Armalli**

She was a bright and bonny lass. Full of zeal and flame and spark. She strode with the aura of success. Yet her face was kind, innocent, and one might even go as far as to say... pure if such a thing exists anymore. The cobblestones did not phase her gait. The very sun did not glare her beauty. Yet she spoke to every soul she met whether by a dignified nod or curtsy or by full conversation. She did not know her grandeur. She was not royalty less she'd be with guards. A high Lady? Or maybe a nobleman's daughter? She could not be far past the age of marriage... surely she was spoken for. But alas, no ring! She was perfect!

I walked to a stand nearby owned by an old woman. A spiteful looking old hag. How hard it was for I to look at her. But she sold the most aromatic flowers and plants around, and this damsel, whether she knew it or not, demanded the best.

"Does the young man wish a bouquet for someone special?" The crone said in her scratchy tone.

"Yes, the most beautiful flowers with the most attractive scent. Only the best will do," I said focusing more on the flowers than the withering woman.

"Oh my! Such a lucky young woman you have. Here. Yes? Lavender, primrose, and edged with Queen Anne's lace. This should suffice, no?" The woman said handing me the collage of complementing colors. I smiled.

"Perfect!" I tossed a coin onto her kiosk. It bounced and rolled off onto the cobblestones. The old woman stooped and hobbled over it. I suspected she would rush off to the Tavern for ale as soon as she groped the coin, she looked the type anyway.

I hurried along the streets, down an alley, and found the young maiden in the heart of the town square with a basket of goods. I smiled as I approached her. I passed by, unseen as I hoped I would be, but as I strode past I was able to slip a single stem of prim rose into her basket.

It didn't take the lass long to notice the sweet scent and finally see the flower. She glanced around and then to her feet where she saw a sprig of lavender. A foot to the east a clump of Queen Anne's lace. She was a curious thing. I knew the feelings bubbling inside her. The desire, the thrill of the mystery, the urge to follow. The feelings I had at her first glance. She was nothing more than a school girl picking each flower up as she followed the trail to the town park near the outside wall of the city. I stood beneath the willow holding the last rose as I stared out along the water's surface. As I heard her approach I looked over and smiled brightly.

"Forgive me sir, but did you leave me this trail? And if I may intrude, why?" She asked holding her knuckles to her jaw fearful and ready to turn and run but to curious, to... aroused either by the mystery, or by myself, to flee.

"I did," I smirked "and why? Because you deserve it my dear. Surely you have had suitors on every hand.

Many young men would simply give you what you wanted but I am a few moons older then the pups and lap dogs which pursue you. You are dignified but all man and murr thrive on the chase," I turned to her fully and took a few step toward her.

"You are the dog!" she shouted as her face scrunched up, deeply offended. Not at what I had said but at the fact I was right. I smirked.

"And you are no better thereof," I chuckled, "You know I am right, otherwise you would have left," She looked struck, as if I had forcefully put her to her knee.

"My name is Anya," she looked down in submission. "You know women well... you are a Shade aren't you?" She asked balling her fists afraid of the answer.

A shade was what the people around the Eastern provinces, like the present town of Larkspur, called someone who would coax young woman into seclusion and take their life.

"No my dear! That is not why I have led you here! I have led you here for much more gruesome a fate..." She took a step back in fear and uneasiness, "... I have asked you here... to sit with me under this tree and bask in the Sun's jealousy over your such radiance as it hides it's shame behind the mountains of the far West," She breathed a sigh of relief and smiled. I thrilled and fascinated her. She walked into the cover of the willow and sat. We spoke for hours of how her father ,a miller a few towns over in Blackram ,had sent her here to start her own living, how her mother had died when she was young, how she looked so much like her. Then the conversation turned to me and my family. I was luckily able to divert the question by pointing her curiosity to the items in her basket. Strange things like wormwood and hemlock,. These were odd things to have on one's person; things that would prove advantageous later.

"Oh!" She cried, "The wormwood is for my neighbor an old woman with terrible pain in her hands. The oils will ease such pain. The hemlock is for Mr. Irvenstein who has an infestation of those wretched rodents. A bit of this and his trouble will be over," She said in her defense. I assured her I did not think anything in her possession malicious. As the sun set we decided to return to the city.

As we entered the gate the old woman who sold me the flowers was being hauled off by the city guards. She was screaming something similar to"I didn't know it was fake, please!". It was hard for me to refrain from chuckling at her ignorance but I managed to keep it down as Anya and all her tearful innocence

Finally the deed was done. The dye was struck. The path was taken. I could not turn back now ...

sobbed on my chest identifying the woman as the poor old wretch she had harvested the wormwood for.

Anya and I continued to meet each afternoon under the willow. Each night we both returned home alone. I needed her innocent, I needed her... naïve. Finally the deed was done. The dye was struck. The path was taken. I could not turn back now ... We announced our engagement.

Anya insisted I ask her father for her hand.

I couldn't! Surely a gentleman of such a nearby province to my home would know the tale, would know my past. I simply prayed that my previous arrangements with what family I stayed in contact with would prove to be... beneficial. My cousin Zaton was to meet us at Shiners' Bridge outside the city of Blackram to accompany me on such a personal matter.

Anya and I took a carriage Southwest to Marinpole, then from there due west to Shiners' Bridge and awaited Zaton. The trip was long but my betrothed kept me company telling me of her home, of the small creek running beneath Shiners' Bridge and how it doubled back behind her father's cottage but how as close as the whole town was to the river how the great plains fire had burned down much of the village several years before. This was something everyone knew of. How the supposed "Gods" ignored their peoples cries for rain to fill Shiners' river before the fire crawled across the hay fields to Blackram. Anya pointed out the Gods still had not filled the stream.

Suddenly, a loud rapping came from outside the carriage it was Zaton! I opened and began to embrace my cousin, who I had not seen in years. We had written many times and he told me how he had grown up well, how all the young damsels fawned over him, and I could see why. His skin was dark and tan, his hair midnight, he had a very muscular build yet was still small framed. I missed my cousin so, and in his letters he often expressed the same for me. However this was not the time for complements nor pleasantries, Zaton was breathing heavily, and smelled of smoke.

"My cousin come quickly! The home of a town's man is ablaze! Just before the bend in the river! The miller's!" A scream came from behind me as my beloved heard the news of her fathers mill. She lept from the carriage and ran across the bridge. Zaton and I followed but in her panic she ran too fast, we could not keep up with the worried miss.

When my cousin and I reached the mill it was too late. We approached just as the roof collapsed. Ashes, smoke, sparks, and flames exploded toward the sky and there on the ground before the house was Anya, sobbing, distraught, hysterical. I approached and helped her to her feet. She pressed her face against my chest and burbled and sobbed and mourned.

Anya and I rented a room at a local tavern. She cried the whole night and I comforted her. Then finally she cleared her throat and raised her head. She had that fire again, that look of determination, which for some would drive them over the edge, however for her seemed to be the only way that she could move on.

"I hope..." she began "...that what has transpired and you seeing me at my worst has not derailed our plans to be wed," She said with a sniffle as she dried her tears.

"My dear, do you not wish to mourn the loss of your father?" I asked, not truly being honest with myself. I wanted to get the marriage done, let the task be null but I needed her to trust me. Besides, I knew that drive in her would not allow her to be troubled for too long, and I was right.

"I have mourned since the morning glories

closed on our windowsill; now, I fear, they prepare to open again. A dark day has befallen my life, let us rid it with promise of an even brighter tomorrow," she said and I couldn't help but smile. She was so beautifully innocent and naiive.

The next day we, along with Zaton, took the carriage to my home, to Taipanspire. As we arrived my family waited on the steps of the manor. My brothers and their wives to the right and my sisters and their suitors to the left and in the center, my mother. My father had died when I was young. My family did not smile but did not dismay at my arrival. They looked calculating, cold, like they were judging dear Anya's worth... and my own.

It was late. My mother and I embraced, which we had not done since I was nearly Zaton's age, however she continued a stern look as if the show of affection was because she had to, I knew the reason but it was not the place to address it. I then introduced Anya. My mother placed her hands on Anya's shoulders and kissed her forehead as she welcomed her to the family. I began to introduce my three sisters: Annabelle, Penelope, and Teresa, and my three brothers: Alexander, Oren, and Julius.

After the introductions were over Anya and I retired to our chamber. She marveled at the large dining room with a balcony over looking The Great Stone River, which we crossed entering Taipanspire, she marveled at the dozen or so paintings lining the great hall, and as we entered our room, she gasped at the immaculate size of our suite. That night we slept together for the first time, yet we were not intimate.

The next morning I awoke to a light rapping at my door. I opened and there was Zaton. He held a letter addressed from my mother. He bowed and left as Anya began to awaken. I opened the letter and read it silently.

Dear Son & Daughter-in-law,

In your honor tonight I shall send for the finest chefs in Taipsanspire and the surrounding cities and we shall feast. Though introductions were pleasant yesterday I still would like to better know my future family. I would like to, therefore, spend the afternoon with dear Anya. Obviously you have changed since last we spoke my son but I feel we will have plenty of time to talk and discuss both the past and the future involvements of you in this family. Nevertheless, I am glad you have returned. Please send Anya and ask her to bring a pot of tea, and do let her know about how I am with my tea.

Thank You,

Veronica Taipan

I walked over to the hearth and tossed the letter in. I then proceeded to put a pot of tea on to boil. Anya had gotten up and walked over to me wrapping her arms around me.

"My mother wishes to have tea with you," I said focusing on the flames beneath the kettle.

"Is that a bad thing my love? You sound unhappy about it," Said Anya as I turned to her.

"Tis not a bad thing... simply, my mother is old fashioned and abides by many strange customs. She is nearly eighty cycles old. For one she wanted me to remind you she does not share a pot of tea with anyone.

If you would like some you will have to brew your own in her chamber but you do not have time to brew it here. As soon as hers is done you must leave, she is expecting you," I said turning and stirring the tea. I knew my mother would wish for tea and the plan centered around Anya presenting it to her. Twas faster than I wished my plan to be executed, but I am nothing if not... resourceful and truly this was the best opportunity to carry it out.

"I will not disappoint her nor you," she smiled and began dressing herself and brushing her hair. Once the tea was done I sent Anya to my mother.

As my bride-to-be spent the day with my mother, my brothers and I went to the grounds behind the manor and practiced our archery. Alexander, of course, was the best. When it came to brute strength he always prevailed. However when we were done we retired to a game of chess which of course Oren prevailed. Julius didn't even attempt he simply sat with his spouse and flirted for the hour.

My eldest sister Annabelle, Alexander's twin, rode up to the game on her favored steed, Blackbrier. Soon Penelope rounded the corner reading some religious writing of a minister in Aridmire. Finally the set of seven was complete when Teresa descended the outside stair from drawing her rendition of the sunrise.

Strength, wisdom, sexual attraction, grace, religious aspiration, and creative ability; It was the joke of the family that the Gods blessed each child with a gift but when I was born they ran out and were unable to grant me one. I, on the other hand, have another idea as to my gift and from where it originated.

That night, as Anya and myself were preparing for the banquet, she told me of hers and my mothers discussion. Of wedding plans, of Anya's family's traditions and of my mother's, and of her view on the woman's place in the household. Over all Anya seemed to think my mother fond of her.

Anya and myself descended the stair and entered the banquet hall. Oren, Julius, and Teresa and their wives and suitors sat at the table and stood around the fireplace drinking brandy, scotch, and wine. It was peaceful, violinists played and the family chatted. Alexander, Annabelle, and Penelope had went to fetch mother who had not exited her chamber since the early afternoon. Timeliness was one of mother's stout expectations and it was not in her nature to be late.

Zaton was there. Alone. Mother had taken him in after her sister and Zaton's father the High Duke of Irantium passed from the plague. I'm sure she was displeased he had not chosen someone to court. However many of the scullery maids and other common workers swooned over him from afar. He knew it and he knew I knew it. He had heard that Anya spent the day with mother. He looked to her, then back to me. I nodded. He returned the gesture.

Suddenly above the serene tranquility a shrill scream followed by a roar of anger and the slamming of doors rose and began it's thunderous roar toward the dining hall. Everyone turned and stared towards the main doorway. Suddenly Alexander burst through followed by Annabelle and Penelope. He stared

at me as a bull does the vicious red cape.

"YOU!!!" He bellowed and charged at me knocking me to the ground groping my throat. Penelope hit her knees crying and praying to deaf and blind Gods. Annabelle rushed over and pulled him off of me.

"Wait! Give him a chance to explain himself!" she yelled struggling to keep him from choking the life out of me. I stood.

"Thank you Anna. Now what's going on?" I asked holding my throat. Annabelle turned and slapped me across the face hard. The sting remained for quite a while.

"Get over yourself you son of a... Gah! We all know it was you! Mom is dead!" she began to tear up. "T.. there was some kind of.. Of strange herb in her drink..."

Penelope stood and held Anna to her comforting her.

"A few weeks back I read the last rites for a man who had killed many people with a strange herb known as Hemlock. The effects seem strikingly... strikingly similar" Penelope said holding back tears herself.

The others stood up and circled around me. If looks could kill, I assure you, you wouldn't be reading this story. But that gift I mentioned earlier, complete and total manipulation! I mustered up a heavy breath, a wimpy voice, a red teary face. It was pathetic... but it worked.

"W..what?!? Mom.. mom is dead? N.. No! This morning she sent me a note, saying she couldn't wait for me to return to the family. Asking to have tea with... Anya!" the group instantly turned to her. She took a step back.

"W.. what? Me! My love! You are speaking from heartache!" Said Anya stepping back fearful for her life.

"Back in Larkspur you said you had hemlock for that gentleman who had the rodent problem! Therefore you were familiar with it's effects. You did this! Who else had access to mother! She spent the whole day with you!" The group of seven slowly surround her backing her slowly to the balcony. She sobbed and cried shaking her head to fearful to speak. She was so innocent so easily subdued, even with words. I continued, "How could you do this to me Anya! Why? What have you to gain? D..do you blame me for not saving your father? Is that what this is about? " she backed against the railing as we encircled her, myself in the center.

"No please, I didn't! I would never! I'm begging you please!" she cried out bracing herself on the railing.

"We will not hear your lies!" shouted Alexander.

"Brimstone take you, harlot of the Devil!" yelled Oren.

"To think my dear brother trusted you!" cried Julius

"May the devil even deny you for your spitefulness!" condemned Annabelle.

"I pray the Gods have pity on a heartless one as you!" chastised Penelope

"Save your breath Penelope! There is no hope for this one!" scolded Teresa.

"And so my dear I am forced to say..." the room grew silent waiting for my judgment.

"No!" Whimpered Anya.

"...Adieu" My siblings began to step toward her.'Twas a battle she knew she would lose. She turned to the railing. The deep canyon and rushing water below. She turned back and stared at me. She finally knew. She was no longer naiive. But it was too late. What could she do?

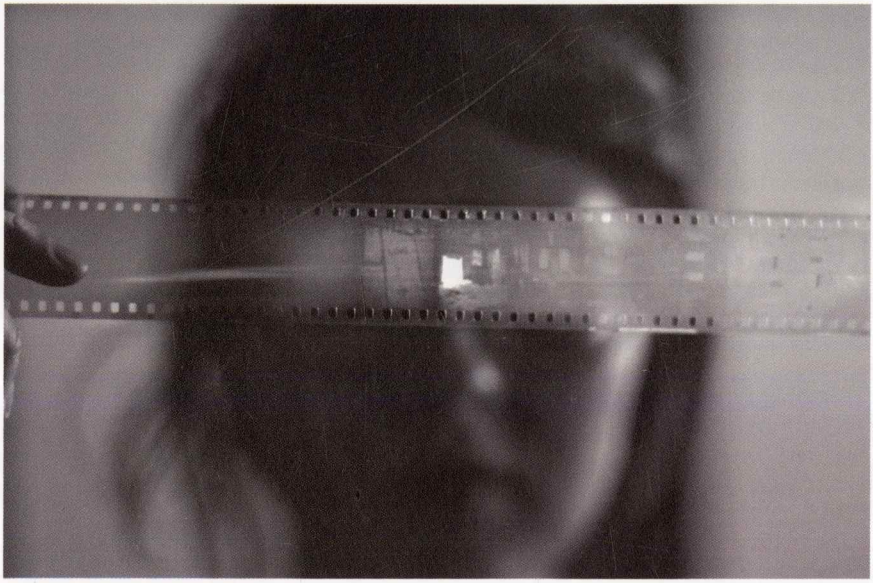
She climbed the railing. My siblings stopped. She turned and looked at me. She fell. Her scream resonated. It churned and seemed to take on a life of it's own as if her very ghost screamed from below turning all of my siblings hearts to ice, till finally everything was still and silent. I knew she was intelligent. The price for murdering a High Lady... Anya chose the best way out.

My brothers and sisters hugged and consoled me then returned to their chambers to sleep, mourn, pray, or a combination of the three. I stood on the balcony not looking down into the water below, but to the cliff on the other side. Where I had left only true love long before I met Anya. When I was banished by mother. Soon Zaton approached me.

"I happen to know from a reliable source that in the instant of your mother's death, this was to be yours," He said handing me the Taipan signet ring. It was a silver ring with scales carved around it and, on the top, the head of a snake with emerald eyes. "Your mother removed you from the family and forbid your first love, maybe now we will both be happy," said Zaton then he turned and left.

I looked out across the land as I slipped on the ring. I smiled and chuckled.

"Perhaps we will,"



Cherish/ **Mary Catherine Fehr**

Our place

By: **J. Russell**

It was a breezy Mississippi day in April when I met her. April 3, 2003, to be exact. I was walking home from school excited about 5th grade graduation tomorrow. I was going to be on the honor role and my mother WAS going to see it. I was so excited that I forgot about the pothole in the street and tripped.

"Need a hand?" I looked up into the face of a blond haired, blue eyed ten year old girl.

"Sure," I said as I took her hand "Thanks."

"You're welcome! I'm Ana, what's your name?"

"Samuel Wood. But 'most everybody calls me Sam. Well, except my sister, she calls me dumbo, twerp, and her favorite is bozo. But I haven't seen her in a while so I guess it doesn't really matter." She laughed and then gave me this real pretty smile. Like the kind you see in movies.

"Are you new here?" I asked

"Naw I've lived here my whole life." She had a rich southern accent, maybe from Georgia or Alabama; a real southern belle type of accent.

"Really, I haven't seen you before."

"I live in the house at the end of the street." She pointed to the house behind her. We must've walked and talked 'cause we were now standing in front of a little white picket fence gate. It was by far the largest house in the whole neighborhood; and could've belonged in the same movie as her smile. It had a wraparound porch on both levels and about a bajillion windows. The windows all had screens on them too and so did the doors, so the bugs wouldn't get in if you left them open; and the door knobs looked like they were made out of pure gold. It looked just like a dollhouse.

"Nice, huh?" she said with a hint of sarcasm.

"It's amazing" I said my jaw now hanging below my knees.

"Saaaaaaam!" my mother called hysterically from our screen door all the way up the street. Not again, I thought.

"I gotta go." I said.

"Ok you wanna hang out Saturday?"

"Sure, my house?"

"Yea" She said. And I turned to go home.

That night I couldn't sleep. I was too excited about seeing Ana again. Now I know that I was ten and most guys my age wouldn't be very excited about hanging out with a girl. (We don't really want to play Barbie or dress-up.) But something was different about Ana; I didn't know it then but that feeling would never leave me and my life would never be the same.

It was 7:00 o'clock in the morning when my doorbell rang. I got up half asleep and went to answer the door like I do every Saturday morning to Ms. Soronto, the crazy lady across the street, only to be cursed at for our air conditioner being too loud, or my mom running into her mail box again. Could this day start out any worse? When I opened the door, half expecting to be badgered with insults and half not caring, there was Ana, standing on my front porch bright eyed and bushy tailed.

"Are you ready? Why are you still in your pajamas? Did you forget? Hurry up and get ready I want to show you something." I really didn't know what she was saying; she was talking so fast and I was still half asleep. All I heard was something about hurrying up and showing me something.

As we walked from my house up to Turner Street, Ana talked at ninety to nothing. I only remember bits and pieces of our conversation. Like she told me that she once saved a bunch of kittens from being hit by a truck and she once climbed a tree as big as a mountain.

Once we turned from Turner Street onto Mayfield I knew she was taking me to the park. I hadn't been to the park since I was seven, because all the kids teased me saying my mom was a crack head and I probably was one too. When I went to St. Peter's Elementary, everyone gave me wedgies, even the girls; and on Halloween kids would crush up their Smarties™, put them on top of cigarette buds they found in the school parking lot and put them in my goody bag.

As we entered the park gate I stuck close to Ana until she took me back past the picnic tables to the edge of the forest.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"This is what I wanted to show you."

"A bunch of trees?" I didn't get what she was talking about.

"No no no, I meant in the trees, there's a trail." I stepped forward for a closer look and sure enough it was a trail into the woods.

It was beautiful; the sun came in from a hole in the canopy above at a perfect angle and there were little pink flowers in the soft, bright green grass.

"Come on." She said

"We can't go in there." I protested.

"Why not?" she asked agitatedly.

"Because there might be snakes or poison ivy or something." I replied a little harshly. Has she never been in her backyard?

"Don't be such a big baby." I followed her into the trees hoping that with maybe two of us nothing bad would happen. The path was long and varied in width from time to time. At some points we could walk side by side and at other points she led and I followed. After about an hour had passed the narrowed trail started to get wider and we walked into a huge circle in the middle of the woods. It was beautiful; the sun came in from a hole in the canopy above at a perfect angle and there were little pink flowers in the soft, bright green grass. There was also a huge rock in the middle of the circle that, in the sunlight, looked like it sparkled.

"Wow", we both said in hushed whispers.

"It's amazing!" I said.

"We should make this our place." Ana said

"Yea", I couldn't believe my eyes. I had never seen such beauty.

"Have you ever been camping?"

"What?" I was so lost in my thoughts and the beauty of the place I didn't hear what she said.

"I said, have you ever been camping?"

"Yea, have you?"

"No, but I would love too."

"Why don't we camp here tonight then?" I suggested.

"Really?" Her face lit up with joy.

"Yea, we have some sleeping bags in the garage that we can use and we can get hot dogs and marshmallows from Grandpa Kipling."

"You have a grandfather named Kipling?" She asked. I didn't know why she would ask a question like that or why she looked kind of scared. Has something happened between them? I thought.

"Well he's not my real grandfather just everyone calls him that. He lives two doors down from you. Didn't you know that?" Her face looked lively again when I told her he wasn't my grandfather. This made my doubts go away. But she didn't answer my question either, instead she started picking up acorns and putting them in her pocket.

"Can we do something first?" I didn't know what she was talking about but I said sure and she guided me out of our hiding place and back to her house. When we got there she told me to wait by the gate. Then she walked around the side of the house and disappeared. Ana returned minutes later carrying two small shovels and two pairs of gloves.

"What's that for?" I asked a little confused.

"I want to plant a tree and some flowers. I thought it might look prettier." I looked around and noticed for the first time that while the house was pretty, the garden was a disaster. It looked like the house had been picked up and moved to a trashy trailer park.

"We're going to plant the tree here so you will know…", she trails off, "well never mind I'll tell you later."I'm confused, what am I supposed to know?

"Well come on I can't plant it all by myself." She laughs and it's beautiful, like little silver bells; and my confusion melts away. We planted her acorn and she stuck a stick in the ground next to it.

"Sam, when you come to my house never go past the gate until I come to this spot." She pointed to where we just planted the acorn. "I mean it; I don't want you to get hurt." Once again I am confused by her ways but I promise to do what she said and she smiles.

"Good. I thought we could plant those wildflowers next week if it doesn't rain." She pointed to the wildflowers on the other side of the gate. She takes the gloves and shovels and tells me to go to Grandfather Kipling's to get the stuff we need while she puts the gardening tools up.

"I'll meet you at your house." She had that same scared look on her face when she said his name and I still didn't understand why. So I decided to ask her that night; but somehow I knew she wouldn't tell me.

I was on my way home to pick up the sleeping bags when Ana came running up behind me.

"Did ya get the stuff?" she asked. I hold up the large brown paper sack a little higher, knowing that she already saw it.

"I found some pillows and a blanket that we can use as a tent." She says holding them up high above her head.

"Ok I'll get the sleeping bags if you

if you carry the food." I said. She looks at me like, Are you out of your mind, but then smiles and takes it anyway. I get the sleeping bags and she throws the pillows on top of them.

"Hey! I can't even see!" I yell like I'm mad, but it doesn't work because I'm smiling. We go in the back gate to the park and almost run to the entrance of "Our Place". I still don't know how we didn't tear the stuff up or trip. When we get there Ana sets up the tent while I gather wood for a fire.

By the time we had finished off the last of the marshmallows it was probably well past ten o'clock. Ana had decided that we didn't need a tent so we put her blanket on top of the rock and sat on it while we finished off the last of the food.

"The stars are beautiful tonight." She sighed in a satisfied way and put her head on my shoulder. We stayed like that for a while, looking up at the stars; together. I was happy; I don't remember the last time I had been happier. And I stayed happy for almost two years; Ana and I would hang out every day during the summer and she would come over during Christmas break. I didn't understand why she didn't go to school but she said her mom didn't want her too and I didn't say anything else. My mom, however, was a different story. We would talk about her a lot. After she had cussed me out for taking her drugs again (which I never did she just forgot where she had put them the night before; and somehow she always managed to find them again in the garbage dump she calls her room) or beaten me I would run out of the house and down the street to Ana's house where she would come outside at any time of day and comfort me.

The night before she disappeared we had just finished her remodeling project and we had actually managed to make a pretty decent bench, which was mostly made up of odds and ends that we found at the junk yard and the strongest glue you could buy then. We were sitting on our biggest accomplishment when she asked me the one thing that I will never forget.

"Sam?"

"Hmm..."

"Can you promise me something?"

"Yeah."

"I want you to promise me that, when I'm gone, you will always take care of our garden."

"I promise."

"Cross your heart and hope to die?" She asked

Then she slowly took my hand in hers and laid her head on my shoulder like she had done so long

me with a look of complete seriousness.

"Cross my heart and hope to die." I said, and I meant it.

"Good" She gave me another Hollywood smile and for the first time I noticed that her eyes weren't blue. Actually, they were every color but blue. She caught me staring at her and looked away. Then she slowly took my hand in hers and laid her head on my shoulder like she had done so long ago. I didn't think anything could happen to us; nothing could separate us. Apparently I was wrong.

Fast forward ten years, I'm almost 22 now. It's a breezy June day and I'm headed back

to Mississippi. Mom's dead. No one knows why or how, though everyone has their suspicions. Sis is coming from Alaska, I think she's married now. Me? I just graduated from Mississippi State with a Bachelors in Landscape Architecture.

Architecture.

That word makes me smile. It's what Ana had called that silly little bench we had made out of odds and ends.

"Oh Ana" I sigh as my blue Ford pick-up stops at the one red light in town. The small town has only gotten smaller, it's old. I sit there for a while, the light's green now but no one else is around. Across the street is the Green Valley Grocery, closed, right next to St. Peter's Elementary, the windows are broken and graffiti covers most of the building. Turner Street is on the left, I'm on Mayfield. I look out the driver's side window and there's the park. Old but still intact, unchanged compared to the rest of the town. I pull into the empty parking lot at Green Valley Grocery and walk across the street to the park. I walk past the slides and swings, past the picnic tables, right to the edge of the forest. The trail is sadly not there. It had grown-up so much that I could no longer see the dirt and pine-needle path that led to "Our" place.

"Ana would be able to find it," I mumbled to myself, "she discovered it, she could find it."

The funeral was brief, just me, Sis and her husband, and Grandfather Kipling. The estate sale was even briefer; everything but the furniture, silverware, and few nice things from our dad that Mom hadn't thrown out, went to Kings Home. Sis didn't stay long, said they had to get back to Alaska for something or other and that she'd call sometime so we could catch up. She still called me 'Bozo' but this time with a small smile. Mom's death was a relief for her I guess.

Grandfather Kipling helped me finish packing the rest of the boxes for Kings Home. Seems like he's the only thing is this town that still has any life in him. When we had finished we sat down on his front porch and he poured himself and I a glass of lemonade. I watch him drink it and slip into his own world of thought. I never did figure out why Ana was so afraid of him. Come to think about it, I didn't figure out a lot of things about Ana; like how come she never let me go past that old stick she stuck in the ground, and what color her eyes really were.

I left Grandfather Kipling thinking in his chair, grabbed my jacket and walked to the house at the end of the street. That beautiful dollhouse was no longer alive either. Like the rest of the town, she had died. The garden, oh the garden, its beauty had disappeared. The flowers that we had planted so long ago were dead and the bench was so covered in rust that, at first, I didn't even realize what it was. I dropped to my knees and started to cry. I'd failed her.

"I promised you I'd take care of our garden, look at it!" I yell to nothing. "I'm sorry....I'm sorry." I whisper. With tears still streaming down my face, I look at the place where the garden at started. Ana's acorn had grown into a large Oak tree, about 18 feet high and 12 inches thick. Ana's tree was the only living thing left. I stood and reached into my jacket pocket and took out the rose that my sister had given to me at the funeral. It was such

a delicate thing, a pure miracle that it hadn't been destroyed in my pocket.

"Why did you leave? Does everything beautiful in this town leave? Does nothing ever stay?" I look at the rose, "You were so much alike," I say to it, "Beautiful, sharp, delicate; something that should never die." I lay the rose gently on the ground in front of Ana's tree. She doesn't appear out of nowhere or speak to me through the tree or call from an upstairs window in that old forgotten house. The only sound that I hear is the birds chirping and the wind in the trees; the only thing that I see is the bright warm sun on the dead grass. She is gone. She won't be coming back.

As I drove home that night I thought of Ana. I thought of her in a peaceful way; no more heartache and sorrow, just love and curiosity. I wondered what color her eyes were.

"They were everything," I decided. "She was everything."

Epilogue

Ana Marie Colette, was only 12 years old when she died on Sunday, July 28, 2005. She and a friend, 12 year old Samuel Arthur Wood, were walking home late Saturday afternoon when Wood was hit by a car that had lost control. Wood pushed Colette out of the way and took the blow. However, after hitting Wood, the car swerved and hit Colette as well. Wood survived with minor brain damage. Colette was killed immediately. Wood has no memory of the accident.

A rose in bloom

By: **Shannon Turek**

The me-loaf exhorts taste

By: **Chris Holder**

I am good for twenty-four hours, this
Pain is subsumed by plentiful powers!

What mortal wounds may zip up nicely?
Whip, to frantic, to beastful, unwind me!
Deep-fried meat climbs through each teat
And burrows, micely, full frontal try me!

I am good for twelve more hours!
This
Pain is subsumed by plentiful powers!

Three hours of joy are yours no catch!
Bite in flesh, bone down to flour!
Mortal toy, bray-ripped and sour!
Every benefit will be yours, Power!

I -- a*m* -- good -- for -- nin*e*ty -- mins --

Buy -- one -- more -- in -- the -- next -- ha*l*f -- hour -- *a*nd -- ear*n* --

Cancer, cancer, lodged deep and grimy,
Bountiful clay, sip grease, you'll shine me!
I am a clambering fool for your gain,
Flip me and spin me and keep on biting!

I am good for 2 more:
Transfers stocked soon, and the skin oils rot through

Cheap, complete clawfeet won't be here for very longer!!
Withering, why have you not yet bought me our
Krubby Kactus Vicely Bonus Set[no. a08jar9]?
Oh how I *l*ove your w*a*rm*th*, my cag*e*
blip

for.one.mor min>> chop
Stump up/mail slip --

Disregarding wisdom

By: **Jessica Marshall**

I knew
from the chills
when you walked in the room
that you were dangerous.
I knew
being held in your arms
looking up into your brown eyes
the pain that was in store
further down the road.
Promises made
so quickly broken
your smile still haunts me
I ache for your touch.
I knew
that my love would never be enough
to hold you.

Canyon 47/ **Wendy Johnson**

iSoul

By: **Mary Katherine Calderini**

I'm not a Satanist. I'm not. Not that I have a problem with Satanists, I just know how this is going to sound, and I'm not a Satanist. I'm Baptist. Well, I guess I am. Can you still be Baptist if you've sold your soul? I'm not sure. They didn't cover that in Sunday school.

Anyway, the first time I met her, I mean really noticed her-met her, I was in physics class. The teacher was droning on about some boring motion stuff and I was looking through Pintrest on my ipad, when someone threw a note on my desk. I was excited! I mean, I love passing notes. I hadn't done it since high school. I thought it might be some juicy gossip, so of course I read it.

"I've been watching you. I think we're cut from the same cloth. We need to talk." signed Walker. I knew who she was. Some goth chick who always sits in the back of the class. A little weird, but I have nothing against her.

I found her after class and told her that I'm flattered, but I'm just not into girls like that, but it turns out she wasn't hitting on me. She wanted to meet me "somewhere safe" she said. She described this lot out behind the campus. She said there were bricks and piles of dirt everywhere, and a dumpster. She asked if I would meet her.

It sounded super weird, I know, but I mean, I was curious. It sounded like something that would happen in a movie, and besides, my Pure Barr class was cancelled that week. Anyway, she seemed like she really wanted to talk to me about something. So, I said yes.

I found that back lot, and she was right. It's totally weird. Like some industrial dump. I don't even know why we have this place, but whatever. Also, there were all these weird crows around. They kept circling in the air and cawing, except for one. It sounded like it was saying Juan, like the name Juan. But that's not important to this story. I just thought it was weird that one of these crows was asking for a guy named Juan. Like what? Who's Juan? Anyway.

I was there for about five minutes before Walker showed up. She looked especially goth today. Ripped black tights, thick, black boots. Black mini-skirt. She had a black t-shirt on, with a picture of a pipe on it. "This is a shirt" it read in scrawled white print. Her black hair was cut in a short pageboy, and her eyes were blue, but not a pretty blue, like the blue of a dead fish. She wore a lot of eyeliner and very red lipstick. As she sauntered up, I saw she had a lollipop in her mouth.

"Hey," She called.

"Hello," I returned. We stood a moment. Walker didn't seem to be in a hurry. "What flavor's that?" I asked.

"What?" Walker frowned.

"You're lollipop. What flavor is it?"

"Nothing." Walker answered with a smile. I must have given her a look, because she went on. "The flavors mystery, but I have this theory, see? Whenever I have a mystery flavor, they don't taste like anything. Like, you never have a mystery and go 'Aha, Blueberry!' So, I have this theory that none of the lollipops taste like anything. But we read the flavor on the wrapper, we say 'Oh, grape,' and we see the purple color and we say 'Looks grape to me,' and we taste it, and it tastes grape because we believe it does. It happens with all the lollipops, except for the mystery. Because it doesn't tell us anything. It's a mystery. So we don't know what to tell ourselves it tastes like, and when we taste it, we can't place it, because in reality it tastes like nothing. It's just that the mystery is the only one we don't lie to ourselves about, you see what I mean?"

I blinked. "Is that why you asked me to this field? To tell me your lollipop theory? We could have talked that over in the caf."

Walker sighed. "No, that's not why I asked you here." She stuck the lollipop in her mouth. "You see, I work for a certain---gentleman." She frowned. "Entity?" I shrugged at her. "Gentity." She continued. "And as of late, this Gentity has become interested in acquiring a certain---thing. A certain thing that we all possess. And I thought you might be interested in selling yours?"

My eyes narrowed. "Do you work for a Pimp? Are you trying to get me to sell myself? Because I'm not about that!"

Walker's eyes widened. She snorted a laugh. "No! I don't want your lady-bits. I'm talking about your soul."

I froze. "My soul?" I watched her. "I didn't know you could sell those."

"Not easily," said Walker, "I mean, not on ebay or something, but when you work for who I do, there are ways."

"Who do you work for?" I asked.

"He prefers to remain a vague shadow figure," said Walker. "Some people don't react well to

his name. It's more fun this way really. It's like an adventure. A secret admirer."

"A mystery lollipop?" I ventured.

Walker blinked. "Sure. He's nothing. If that helps. The same nothing as you or me. He just deals in souls is all."

"You said sell," I said. "How much money is he offering?"

"Not money."

"Not money?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"Power. Ability. The means to get what you want." Walker smiled.

I didn't. "What do you mean? What kind of power? Like, I'll be a CEO power? Or like, I have super strength and laser eyes power?"

"I can't exactly disclose the details right now." Walker shrugged. "You'll find out when you sign."

"That's it? That's all I get to know? I'm supposed to sign on faith?"

"Think of it this way. Do you read all the terms and conditions for iTunes?"

"No, no one does."

"Yeah, you know what you want, and you know what you have to do to get it. You might not know all the details, but you know it will be good. So you sign. How is this any different?"

She had a point. And I used iTunes a lot more than I used my soul. "Would it hurt? To sell it, I mean."

I mean, either Walker was crazy, which I considered. But if that was the case, no harm done

"No," said Walker. "In fact, a lot of people say they feel better, lighter. Souls are surprisingly heavy. And you'll have all that new found power to play with. You won't even notice it's gone."

I thought it over. I couldn't see a downside really. I mean, either Walker was crazy, which I considered. But if that was the case, no harm done. And if she wasn't crazy, then I get a whole iTunes terms and conditions worth of power. Did I really need my soul? I never used it, and maybe with all my power, I could more than make up for any differences I found. Walker was staring at me, waiting for an answer.

"Have you missed yours?" I asked.

"Mine?" asked Walker.

"Your soul? I assume you've already sold it?"

"Oh." Walker shrugged. "I never really had one."

"But we all do."

Walker shifted to her other foot. "I come from a different---place than you. Where we don't have them, like you. So, I've never really had one, because I'm not really---from here, like you."

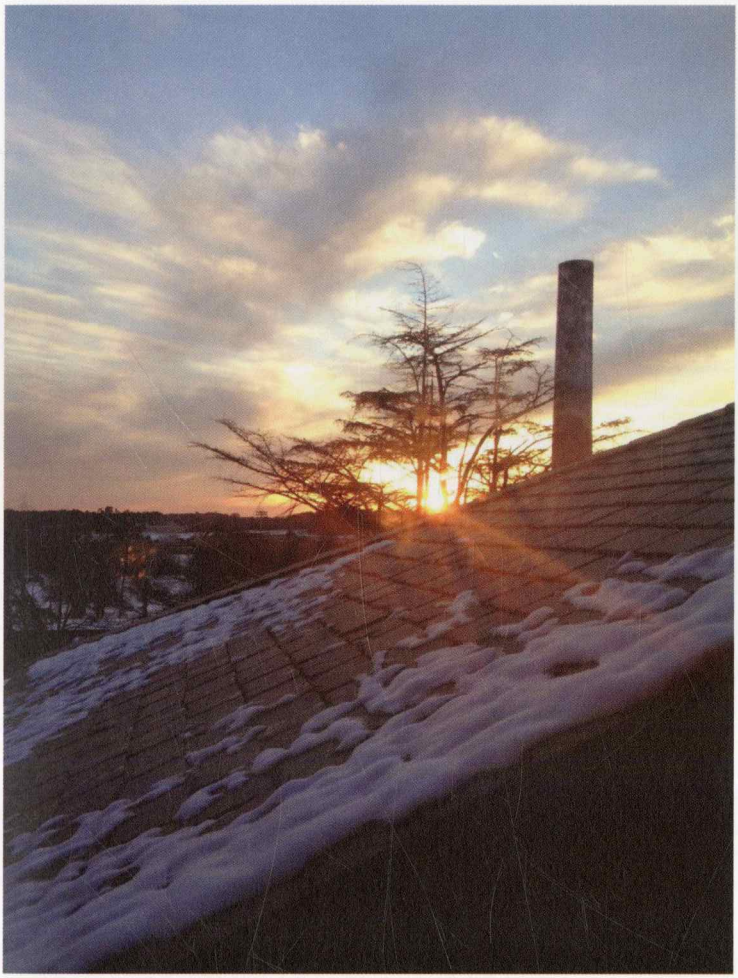
We stared at each other. I mean, what do you say to that? "Why me?" I asked her.

"I saw you the other day. That girl, the stairs. You seemed to be the type I'm looking for."

Oh, she's referring to Sarah. I admit it, I pushed her down some stairs. I know that sounds bad, but you don't understand. She's so annoying. Like, she talks in class all the time, but not in the good way. And I think she was flirting with that guy next to her, who I really think has a girlfriend, and that's not

cool, you know? And I think she stole a kids pencil once. He had a purple once in class, and later she had a purple one! That purple one! And she's fine, anyway. I mean, I think she is. She hasn't come back to school yet, but I'm sure it's nothing. And no one saw me anyway. They just think she fell, so it's cool. I just wanted her to Stop. Talking.

"So, we got a deal?" Walker held out a sheet of paper. So many tiny words. iSoul terms and conditions. She was right. I didn't want to read all that. "Just sign at the bottom." She handed me a pen. What else could I do at that point? I signed my name. Walker smiled and snatched the sheet back. "Excellent. You'll be hearing from us soon." Before I could say anything, she was gone, already skipping away. All that remained was a lollipop wrapper, mystery flavor.



Montevallo sunset/ **Cori Clark**

The Beaumont Hotel trophy wife

By: **Andrew Cromer**

I could see why he wanted a divorce. Even though she was the first one in town to greet a stranger like me, her general perkiness was head-splitting. She looked like the typical ex-trophy wife: blonde hair in a ponytail, tight hot pink shirt that barely covered her tits and long black workout pants that conformed to a perfectly formed ass. Her face didn't match her body. She had worked hard on her body; she let a hack work on her face. She had big bulbous lips that appeared as if they had been stung by bees, as well as an off-putting grin that never seemed to move. She had great eyes; something was behind those eyes, maybe the remnants of a lifelong dream that never materialized. The rest of her plastic face, however, made her eyes seem out of place. I knew her type the second she started to approach me.

"Welcome to Beaumont. I'm Annabelle Stewart."

She held out her hand to shake mine. I usually try to avoid shaking hands with people I'm working over, but I felt ignoring such a meaningless tradition would stand out in this tiny Mississippi town.

"Me and my husband run the hotel."

There was only one hotel in Beaumont, one bank, one grocery store, and one church. The rest of the town square was littered with hobby-shops that sold different odds and ends like flowers, embroideries, baked goods, and cheap wedding dresses.

"How do you do miss?"

The whole community seemed to pour out of their mini-shops when they noticed me loitering in their peaceful little town.

"We don't get many strangers here as you can see."

Her tone was pleasant. She had a soft tone; one that instantly comforted me. I thought, had she been given a chance, she would have made a pretty good mother.

"Do you need a place to stay, or are you just passing through?"

"I'm gonna need a room if you've got one available."

"We sure do. Just follow me and we'll get you all taken care of."

The Beaumont Hotel was nice enough. It was very clean with large mirrors on either side of the foyer. I noticed Annabelle judging herself as we walked to the front desk. A tall man with glasses, well off judging from his wrist watch, stood behind the counter pouring over what appeared to be the hotel ledgers.

"This is my husband, Richard. He'll take care of all your needs."

"Annabelle I don't have time for this." Richard said as he looked up from his books. "Oh, I didn't know we had a new guest. Welcome to the Beaumont, sir. We have plenty of rooms available. How long are you

staying with us?"

"How much for the week?"

Richard pulled the hotel guestbook out from under the papers he had been studying and started to lightly hum.

"We have a room available for $88 a night."

"First floor?" I asked.

"Room 138."

"That's perfect."

"We'll just need a credit card, sir."

Annabelle said goodbye to Richard, blowing him a kiss and offering a wink my way. It was not a sexual wink, just one of those annoying facial tics that small town people seem to develop after having to fake niceties for way too long.

"Credit card? My ass." I said as Richard began silencing me as if there were others around.

"May I speak with you in the back, sir?" Richard was still playing his hotel manager role.

Richard looked upset. I couldn't tell if it was anger or anxiety that made him so shaky and caused him to fumble into the back room and quickly lock the door behind me.

"Are you fucking crazy? You weren't supposed to be here till Thursday. I have to be out of town."

It's the same every time with these rich assholes. They think that because they have money they make all of the rules.

"Well, I'm early. And I need to talk to you. The price just went up."

"We agreed on $50,000!"

"Now it's $100."

"This better work. You tell your guy he better take some damn good pictures."

...I forgave him. Mainly because $100,000 in cash looked great spread out into ten separate piles on the Beaumont Hotel room bed

"No guarantees, but I've never failed before."

"I hope my wife thinks you're as smooth as you believe you are." Richard said as he began to unlock and open the door.

"I'll get her, don't worry about that. And Richard...Cash...upfront."

"How the hell am I supposed to get that kind of money without raising suspicion?" Richard whispered as he pulled the door closed again.

"Not my problem. Have it by tonight."

These guys. They want a divorce, but they don't want to pay their wives anything. $100,000 seems like a lot of money to pay a guy to seduce your wife and snap a couple photos, but I guess it's better than the alternative. I don't know what Richard is worth, or how much his wife would want, but I can bet it was a hell of a lot more than $100,000.

The next morning, I woke to a loud bang on my hotel room door. No one was there, but the full duffel bag let me know who had finally come around. He was late, but I forgave him. Mainly because $100,000 in cash looked great spread out into ten separate piles on the Beaumont Hotel room bed. The cheap duffel bag was an eyesore, but a typical choice. These rich guys won't waste a cent if they don't have to. It probably only

set Richard back ten dollars, yet I'm sure he was pissed at having to buy the bag in the first place. I couldn't care less. Now that I had my money, I could call my guy, Tommy.

Tommy was a master photographer. It wasn't just his ability to stay hidden and take great pictures; it was his technique. He could capture passion in his photographs. Judges can be indifferent to some photos, but passion stays burned into the memory. Tommy was the best.

"Tommy, I need you in Beaumont, Mississippi."

"When?"

"Now. Can you make it?"

"Give me a few hours. Same setup as before?"

"Yeah, I'll text you the location."

"Good Deal."

Tommy didn't talk much, but he was dependable.

When I left my room that night, Annabelle had been at the hotel bar for a while it seemed. It was late, and the bar was completely empty, not even a bartender. Annabelle sat on the center bar stool with a fifth of bourbon. Her face looked the same, but her eyes showed deep sadness. She looked at me with longing; practically begging me to sit with her.

This is too easy. I thought as I sat down next to her.

"You look like a man that knows people." She said as she poured a second bourbon for me.

"I know a little." I added.

"My husband is having an affair. I just know it. He's says he's going out of town for business, but I know he's going to see his whore." She downed the final shot in her glass and started to pour another. I reached over and took the bottle from her before she could finish filling her glass.

"He's an asshole if he is. You are a very beautiful woman." I said as I put my hand on her thigh.

"You're good." She turned red and flirtatiously smiled.

"I know I am, it's a curse."

"A curse?"

"Yeah, like now. Even when I'm serious it always sounds like a line."

She laid her hand over mine; the one that was still on her thigh, and smiled.

"Either way, it was a good line."

"Tell you what; I would very much like to take you upstairs."

"I wish I could, but I'm not that kind of woman, and even if I was, the people in this town talk."

"Look, there is no one around. There is no one here to judge you. It's just us," I said as she looked down at the floor nervously. I could tell she wanted to.

"I'll make this easy," I said. "I'll go back to my room, and if you happen to pass by, feel free to stop by. No one will ever know."

I stood from my chair and finished off my drink. As I left the bar for my room, I pulled out my phone to text Tommy.

BEAUMONT HOTEL...ROOM 138.

I was hardly surprised to hear a knock on my door. What surprised me was that it had taken thirty minutes for her to get up the nerve. She looked terrible, but I showed her in with a seductive smile.

"Please don't speak," she said as she carefully laid her purse down next to the queen bed. She proceeded to attack my face with her tongue and her gigantic lips. They weren't much to look at, but they did feel nice. She walked toward the bed nervously, so I slowly moved toward her and began removing her clothes. She had such a great body. I could tell she was self-conscious. As I removed the last bit of her clothing, she cowered toward the bed, almost begging to get underneath the covers. I pressed her naked body against mine, and she finally relaxed and sunk into it. As we fucked, I thought that Tommy must be getting some pretty great pictures. There was no need to manufacture passion. This girl had not been laid in a while. She was a great lay. The best $100 grand I ever made.

"That was amazing," she said soft and soothingly when we finished. She then snuggled up between my arm and my chest. Normally, I would have gotten the hell out of there, but I stayed. I guess part of me hoped we would go at it again in the morning.

I had a crazy dream that night. I couldn't quit screwing Annabelle. Tommy was in the room laughing at me and snapping pictures. Every photo he took made a horrible popping sound. Tommy smiled at me as he raised his head out from behind the camera.

"Help me!!" he screamed, then raised the camera again.

POP POP

"Get Up!"

I felt cold steel between my eyes.

"I said get the fuck up!"

The confusion started to fade and my eyes began to clear. Annabelle was straddling me with a gun resting on my forehead.

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked, knowing from the anger in her eyes that I had been found out.

"You think you can set me up? You think you and my husband can fool me?" She was pissed.

"What are you talking about?" I tried to keep my cool, but I was definitely nervous.

"Don't lie to me! I know what you are here to do!" She started crying.

That was when I saw it in her eyes. She was going to kill me. I decided to try and knock the gun away, but before I could make my move she pulled the trigger.

CLICK

The chamber was empty.

"You fucking bitch!"

I couldn't control my anger. I don't know how many times I hit her ugly face, but she was certainly out cold after the first blow. When I stopped, I wasn't sure if she was alive or dead. I wasn't sticking around to find out. I grabbed my shit, also the gun, and the money and walked out of my room. I looked around. There was no one in the hall. I guessed no one had heard a thing. When I made it into the lobby, I noticed a body lying in a pool of blood in the middle of the floor. It was Tommy.

"Tommy!" I ran to his side, but he was dead. Gunshot wounds to his head and his chest. No one knew he was in town. No one knew Tommy.

What the hell is going on?

I hardly had time to ponder that thought. The sheriff's deputies

blasted through the front doors of the hotel. The two giant mirrors in the foyer burst into a thousand shards from whatever concussive device they used to render me immobile. Next thing I knew I was face down on the floor and handcuffed.

"Why don't you do us a favor and confess," a giant excuse for a police officer said to me as we sat across from one another in a windowless interrogation room. "We got the evidence son, make it easier on yourself."

"Just what is it you'd like me to confess to?" I asked.

"We got you on double murder, attempted murder, and armed robbery. You're going away for a long time."

"Double murder?"

"That's what I said, and armed robbery."

"I didn't rob anyone, and I certainly didn't kill anybody."

"The money in your bag was taken from the hotel vault. We can also match your gun with the bullets that killed Richard Stewart and a Thomas Smith." The officer threw down photographs of Richard's and Tommy's dead bodies while he leaned back in his chair.

Richard's dead? I thought. What the hell is going on?

"What happened?" he asked barely pretending to entertain my side of the story.

"I don't know. I've been set up" I said.

"We have a statement from Mrs. Stewart saying that you killed Richard and forced her to open the hotel vault."

It all became clear. Annabelle.

"After you had the money, you tried to kill her."

"That's a lie. She's the--"

"I figure you got in an argument with your partner and killed him too." The officer leaned forward in his chair, "Am I getting warm?"

"I told you, I've been set up, I don't even have a gun."

"We found a gun in the bag you were carrying; along with the money from the vault. Your fingerprints were all over em."

"I swear it was Annabelle. She set me up." I tried but the officer just laughed.

"Son, you're reaching. I guess she beat herself within an inch of her life too"

"I'm telling you, I didn't do any of this."

"We can also match the blood on your clothes with that of Annabelle Stewart. What do you have to say about that?" A look of accomplishment was on his face.

I knew then that it was too late. I had been played. I could see that bitch now in her tight, hot pink shirt, and her long black workout pants, her perfect body, and her jacked up face. She killed her husband. She killed Tommy. She pinned the whole thing on me. Richard was wrong. She didn't want half of his money; she wanted it all. It's so fucked up. I bet she got a pretty fat insurance payout too.

"I want a lawyer." I said.

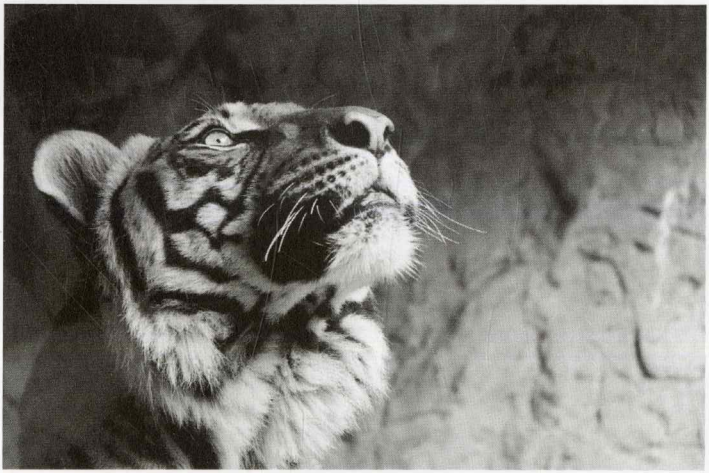
The officer smiled across the table at me

"Of course."

I am the lion of Oz

By: **Asha Butler**

I was cowardly today.
More like tonight.
It's something about the sun that gives me confidence.
Its brightness gives light and life to anything it graces with its warmth.
The moon however is only a dim reminder on the darkness of the world as it shadows all good in the maddening black.
No one can see or hear who or what you really are at night.
I was cowardly at 7:23 pm.
Right after class when I saw you leave the room.
Soon after I found her and took her to where she needed to go.
Then you came and I left feeling unwelcoming.
Almost as if I was an intruder on your new friendship which was once mine too.
I was cowardly on a Tuesday.
I let what you said and did take a home in my mind and it stayed and festered until...
Well I hear you all the time.
Your voice screams getting louder after each sentence and its deafening but I still hear it.
It's nothing good or bad I suppose.
Just the truth.
The soul crushing reality that I did not dare to face on my own.
I was a coward today.
Luckily cowards have a way of being cowardly in secret so you will never know what you made me into.



The Malayan tiger/ Jeremy Black

Magnolia lane

By: **Mary Katherine Calderini**

Come on down, ladies and gentlemen! Come on down to Magnolia Lane! Open one night a year, ladies and gentlemen. Just one night! But what a night, my friends, what a night indeed! So much to see, dear people, so very much to see. I hear you woman in the back. I hear you asking "which night, good fellow? Which night of the year?"

Why my dear woman, to tell you which night would steal away at least one eighth of the fun. Where's your sense of suspense and surprise? Do you want me to ruin it for everyone else? For shame, good lady, for shame indeed. It is the opinion of Magnolia Lane that if you are truly interested in witnessing its greatest night of the year, you will figure it out yourself, by any means necessary. Even if you have to march yourself down to Magnolia Lane every night. It's worth it I assure you. And Magnolia Lane will appreciate your dedication. It will remember your devotion when the time comes.

You really must see it, ladies and gentlemen. Wonders you won't be able to comprehend! Sights that will drive the sanity right from your mind. Leaving you stumbling in awe. Yelling with triumph as you experience your last coherent thought before madness descends upon you. I hear you good Sir, yes you, Sir, to the left of the woman in the mink stole.

"Is it safe?" you say. "Can we truly enjoy Magnolia Lane with raving visitors running amok?" I hear your concerns, good Sir, cherish them even. They are as close and dear to me as my own terrors and nightmares. But rest assured that those people will not long remain among you. Those special few who truly experience the whole of wonders that Magnolia Lane has to offer, by losing who they are and their sentience entirely, are quickly ushered to the back of Magnolia Lane. Where the shops run out, and the sunshine stops. Where a slight chill consistently hangs in the air no matter what the season. Where witnesses report fits of doubt, and dark memories, long believed to be forgotten, return to haunt anew. Several say they sense the presence of someone right behind them, just over their shoulder, but every time they turn, they are greeted by a vast nothingness that leaves them more shaken than the moment before.

A section enjoyed by all who visit, although no one ever returns from that particular part of Magnolia Lane. Out of fun, dear Sir, I assure you, purely out of all the fun they are having there. Oh, what a treat those special visitors experience!

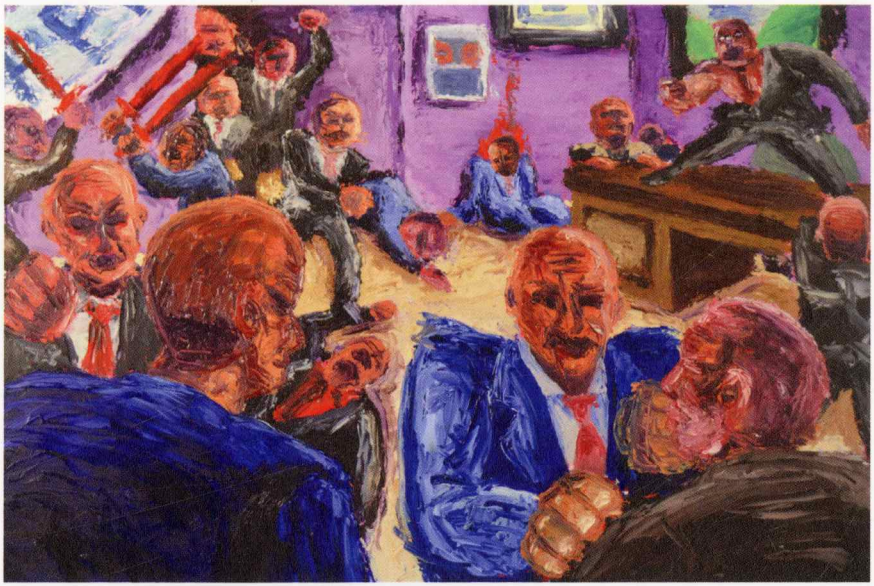
But while I have you, my lovely audience, while I hold your attention with every letter that tumbles from my lips, while your minds are mine, your eyes, many at a time, boring into my face, my body, my entire being, as I utterly absorb you with words so you utterly permeate me with your gaze, while all this happens, this synthesis between us that has never been nor will ever be exactly this way again, allow me to entice your fantasies with what wonders and terrors are to behold on the most magnificent night of

the year when Magnolia Lane stoops so low as to allow you entrance.

If you happen to find yourself in love, your first stop should most definitely be the large tree right at the beginning of Magnolia Lane. For generations, young lovers and hopeful wishers alike have carved their initials into that tree, in the hopes of strengthening their bond of love for all eternity. I should warn you though, you little scamps, to wear shoes you don't mind getting dirty. The tree has a tendency to bleed and/or spew black bile as the knife cuts through its delicate bark into the tender wood beneath it. I can't tell you the complaints I've received from over dressed-neat freak lovers just because the acidic content of the blood and bile ate through their shoes and burned their feet. Honestly, it's usually only mild scaring, and who cares if you have to wear closed toed shoes? On another note, you should probably also bring ear plugs as the tree is given to screaming and shrieking. It can be quite loud and if your eardrums burst that's just more blood on your shoes and another form for you, and hey, I don't want that. I'm here to help you out. To guide you through the multifaceted wonderland that is Magnolia Lane on its most wonderful night of the year.

But don't stop there, ladies and gentlemen, don't stop there. Come on down to Sully's Apothecary. Sully's Apothecary, ladies and gentlemen, what a treat for you! How lucky you are to witness Sully's Apothecary with your own eyes, your own nose, and all the rest of you as well. And I've heard tell that Sully has really outdone himself this year with the treats he's cooked up just especially for you lovely folks. He's been working on his grade-A cough syrup all year long, and he's finally ready to sell it right from his cauldron to your gaping maws of sickness and malady. Yes Sir, the Guinea pigs have finally stopped dying---instantly. Half still die within the week, but the other half are the perfect specimens of health and youth. Ladies and gentlemen, what a treasure! And all for you! Be sure to thank Sully for his generosity on your way out, or else. Still looking for that special someone to carve your initials into the screaming blood tree with? Then Sully's got just the stuff for you. Head on down and ask him for his special two part love potion. Works every time, ladies and gentlemen. You will get your object of affection guaranteed! Simply slip part one into your beloved's food or drink, then wait for the symptoms to start. Once they start gasping for air and bleeding from their orifices, lovingly inform them that unless they love you, they will die, as only you hold the antidote. Works like a charm! A dark, pulsating, rage filled charm.

So much more, ladies and gentleman, so much more for you to see and experience! The church of the unknown god, Old woman Suzie's house on the hill, the Cage, but I don't want to give away all the fun! You simply must see for yourself, lovely men and women, so come on down! Come on down to Magnolia Lane on its most wonderful night of the year. We'll be waiting for you. We always are.

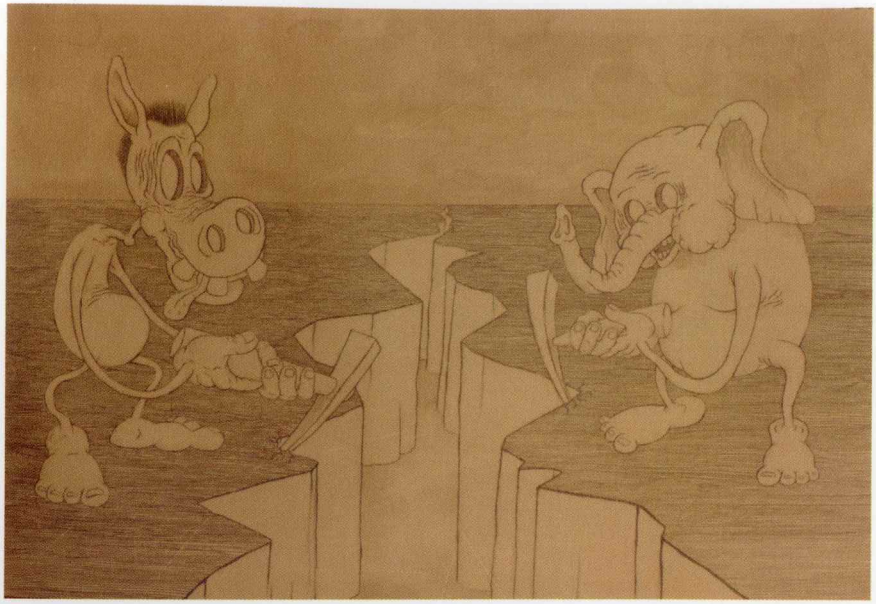


A hiccup in productivity/ **Joseph Whitt**

The waters you once splashed in

By: **Lily Elmore**

How often did you pass by me, unobserved?
How often due to you was my trajectory ever so slightly curved?
Were you on a train I anxiously waited to pass
A blurred image sipping coffee through window glass?
It is this sonder that I ponder as I ride along the rails
Before our lives collided, did I bask in your contrails?
And were this true, if I was minutely changed by you
Did I in passing blindly do the same to you?
How many times did the flapping monarch of a choice of mine
Result in a terrific hurricane to affect the life of thine?
The lovers we are now were once true strangers
And while today we are truly game changers
We were merely ensembles on each other's stages
'Til each burst into stardom in the other's pages.
It is strange to wonder this, to wander off in my own mind-
Were I to really look, what small connections could I find?
Have the waters you once splashed in ever dripped into my sink?
It is times like this, in hours of mist, which of this make me think.



Us vs them has little to do with you and I/ **Nathan Harper**

The waiting room

By: **J. Russell**

Up and arched over, Kathy is seen glaring at a black and white photograph on page twenty-three of the crinkled, vanity magazine she picked off the communal table. Thomas has returned unnoticed with the coffees, positioning himself next to his wife. The rich scent of espresso rushes into Kathy's expression, but her focus remains unstirred as her husband asks, "What are you staring at?"

Moments pass. With eyes lingering on the page, she replies, "Why do you think he is screaming?" tilting the picture to Thomas.

"I don't know, how am I supposed to know?"

It was the persistence of it all. The unwavering of clocks ticking above the front desk, the insistent tapping of Kathy's heels and the perpetual slamming of doors from every direction that darkened Thomas' mood. Having already glanced through the mediocre selection of reading material, several times over, Thomas felt indifferent to his wife's question. He couldn't recall an article or photograph that held his attention beyond the passing of the page, and certainly not to the point of distraction. The couple was there for a reason, and that was not to be forgotten.

This image, the object of her gaze, had been circled with emphasis by the tip of a red pen. The ink coiled over a photo

whose focus is between two men: One, an officer in uniform, whose face is concealed by another cop. And the other, two eyes closed, dimpled lines stretching into parentheses. The mouth, agape, launches into screams. Here, Thomas sees a shouting man being detained by a headless badge. The picture is not recognized.

Kathy asks, "Maybe he was a protestor at a rally?"

"He's probably just a criminal attempting to escape."

It was the possibility that this man, portrayed with such vivid passion, could be anything other than a hero that crushed Kathy. She wanted to believe that he was howling for truth, that his screams would not be received in vain. That happy endings do exist and that one can get better. She thought, Surely, one can get better.

Gasping hacks from across the room cause the couple to glance up in unison. Its source, an old woman whose right hand covers her whooping jaws with a lavender kerchief, the same shade as her head scarf, and the other grasps a walking stick that when vertically situated extends beyond her feeble reach. This walnut cane had held a tight residence in her left palm since the last doctor came in with an unpromising update, hours before her coughing startled the disturbed couple from across the room.

Marian presses her wrinkled thumb into the wooden grooves where its owner had left his mark. Her petit fingers are eclipsed by this empty substitute, though not inciting in her the same pleasures as when it was her husband's hands, and not hers, that were doing the nudging. After seventy faithful years, Albert's heart collapsed due to a nasty habit of enjoying his wife's cooking to excess. His survival now relied on the diligence of the hospital staff. What with the constant administration of oxygen, nutrition, and waste distribution, including the numerous intruding tubes attached to blinking, beeping machines all serving Al to keep him alive. Marian feels useless to her husband, an experience both new and unfamiliar.

She senses another fit of coughing begin to drudge itself out, but before reaching for her hanky, a herd of paramedics stampede through the double-wide entryway, taking with them two gurneys strapped with a pair of bruised and bleeding. The last bandaged figure wails as the woman on his right repeats: It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. Blood and bones peek through the white gauze. The gore was too much, so Marian shuts her eyes and whispers a prayer. A few tears escape her, leaving a wet trail in their passing. This catching the attention of a uniformed, young male from across the room. The large teenager didn't appear in any way bruised or bleeding, but like her, was waiting.

The boy is alone. The elderly woman's emotional state elicits no response from the kid. Instead he stares and implores, Must she do that in here? Dan was coming down from what he initially concluded as being a wicked case of the flu. A week earlier, he had pillaged through the medicine cabinet at home, finding no relief amongst the sea of mom and dads' unmarked bottles of stimulants and relaxers. Up then down was the nod he gave to the pharmacy clerk when she asked if he was under the age of eighteen.

You need a parent or adult to buy this for you, ya know.

Defeated, Dan remounts his bicycle, directing his pedals towards the local hospital. The nurse hands him a clipboard and a pen, the second nurse says, This will hurt only for a second. The next nurse leaves a voicemail on his phone. This message is for Dan Burke. The results from your tests last week came in. We need you to come in as soon as possible. Still draped in cleats and pads, Dan has found himself seated yet again in the coughing, crying and dying room.

Thumbs twiddle around the velcro straps of his lineman gloves, its gristles snatching on its ends. Earlier, after football practice, coach and the school counselor pulled him on the bench to discuss a circulating, and confirmed, rumor about his ex-girlfriend. Who, according to the cheerleading squad and Maddy Dotts from Honors Club, is 'totally' HIV positive.

You need to get tested, Dan.

Dan looked up towards his sobered mentor, a man he had met two years earlier on the first day of freshmen boot camp. He drove him harder than the other players. You're thick-skinned, boy. You'll go far. On the field, Dan drove himself through defensive walls of pubescent boys, steam plowing over the smaller one's and cutting short the larger one's.

He says nothing, not to his concerned coach, not to the floozy school counselor, a favorite of recent-divorcee teachers, not to his parents, whose living room couch is permanently imprinted with their ever-present slovenliness. Nothing to the slew of prodding and pestering nurses who keep trying to falsely ensure him that, This won't hurt but a bit, honey.

"Dan Burke." A female voice calls him from across the room.

Nothing.

Again, more agitated. "Dan Burke?"

Peeking from beneath his letterman, Dan halfway raises hand.

The nurse steps closer. "Dr. Plath will see you shortly. Do you have a parent or guardian with you today?"

Nothing.

Typical, the nurse thought. I've just met the boy and he's already playing games with me. "Here! Fill this out, and bring it back to the front desk when you're done." Paige slaps a chart in front of Dan's obscured face, gaining his attention.

"Gimme that." Right hand retracts, retrieves the clipboard, slinks back behind his jacket.

The nurse stands quiet, empty-handed, and returns to the front desk. This incident with the boy was one of many Paige experienced this afternoon. They warned me about this. As a first year nurse, she was still discovering the range of hospital life, from the cheery optimists to the terminally devestated. Regardless of their disposition, they teach you to remain unattached.

For example: Never tell a patient your full name, especially if that patient is a hysterical, young mother void of her newborn child. She will scream, Paige Lee-Vincent, you lying bitch! You told me he was going to be okay, that he'd make it through the night. But, where is he now? Huh?

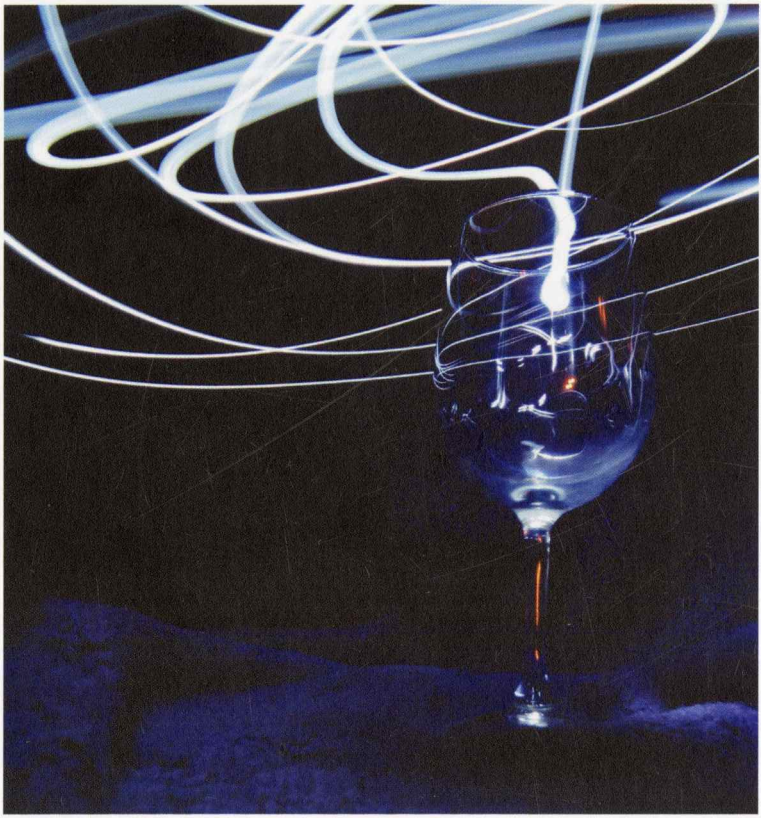
Paige wants to answer, but protocol prevails. I'm not supposed

to say. In the lowest level of the hospital, cradled in gauze and formaldehyde, the baby has been placed under the pathologist's tender-cutting care. The childless parents now sit in the waiting room across from Paige, as she struggles to remain unattached.

From her desk, she notices that the husband had left the hysterical mother alone for a moment, returning unnoticed with two handfuls of hospital-grade, liquid dirt. She didn't stir. There was something before her, something so captivating that it begged her attention, until disturbed by her unconcerned partner who without interest asks, What are you staring at? And without hearing the words, Paige knew her response. She was reliving it, that first and final moment. In her mind, his teensy fists still clenched tight as in protest of leaving his mother's warm and familiar womb. Born frozen, mouth still open as in mid-cry. As if it was for his mother's attention. As if it was for:

Nothing.

Remember, Paige. This is why you don't get attached.



Sempiternal/ **Chantel Clubb**

University of
Montevallo